HOMILIES ON ALL THE SUNDAY GOSPELS

FINCO-DUNNE

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HOMILIES

ON

ALL THE SUNDAY GOSPELS *of the* ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR

BY

THE REV. GAETANO FINCO

TRANSLATED FROM THE SECOND ITALIAN EDITION BY

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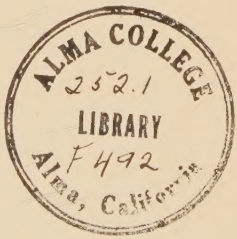

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FOREWORD

The learned and humble Author of these Homilies declared, in his publication of them, that they were not intended to see the light. The Diocesan Examining Board of Turin, however, judged otherwise.

In preaching to his people, Father Finco aimed at simplicity and brevity — two rhetorical qualities which every clergyman having the pastoral care of souls might do well to cultivate. The average congregation composed of the toiling masses cares little for profound theological pronouncements which it cannot understand. Besides, to deliver such sermons is like overloading a delicate stomach with heavy, indigestible food fit for a ploughman or piano-mover.

With due apologies to the esteemed Author, we have taken the liberty of changing and even omitting entire sentences of the original text, whenever such alterations and omissions appeared to us expedient and suitable for American readers. For the same reasons, a discourse by Musso has been inserted in lieu of the homily for the Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension.

If in their English garb, greatly inferior indeed to their original and attractive Italian costume, these Homilies prove helpful to our co-laborers in the Vineyard, and thus contribute indirectly to the glory of God and the salvation of souls, we shall feel amply remunerated for the trouble experienced in the work of translation.

TRANSLATOR.

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Homilies on All the Sunday Gospels of the Ecclesiastical Year

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

That ancient fallacy proclaiming the eternity of matter is taught in certain modern schools and even diffused among the common people. It is asserted that this globe we inhabit was not created by God, but formed itself through a chemical combination of atoms whirling about through infinite space, and that it will continue to revolve without end around the sun in company with the other planets.

We Christians fortunately have the beacon light of divine revelation to enlighten our minds and show us what has been the origin and what will be the final destiny of the universe. We read in fact on the first page of the inspired book that primitive matter was by no means eternal, but created in the beginning by Almighty God, that in six successive days (which may be interpreted as myriads of years), it was arranged by Him in a way to serve as a fitting habitation for man who was to reign over all other creatures. We read moreover in to-day's gospel that solemn prophecy of our Divine Lord announcing to His Apostles the final consummation of the world and describing to them the signs which will precede that great catastrophe. Let infidels amuse themselves with their foolish vagaries while we reverently listen to and religiously meditate upon the sublime truths revealed to us by our infallible Master and loving Father, in order that knowing the fragility of earthly things

destined to perish, we may learn to despise them and love things celestial that shall last forever.

I

The earth we inhabit was frequently the theatre of great revolutions, of frightful cataclysms the vestiges of which are still visible upon its surface, just like the human body still retaining on its members the scars of ugly wounds. But what are all these partial disturbances that have affected merely the surface of the globe when compared to that final catastrophe which will strip it forever of all its inhabitants and reduce it to a heap of smoking ruins? Our Lord says that there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, by reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves: men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. For the powers of heaven shall be moved. This last phrase clearly indicates the real cause of that general confusion which will bring about the world's destruction. The universe is preserved and subsists only because God continually governs it by means of certain laws which all irrational creatures blindly obey. But scarcely will the Supreme Artisan have reached the end of His creation and the number of the elect completed, than He will allow the great machine of the universe to disintegrate, disturbing that wonderful mechanism which controls the various functions of its parts. Thus disorder will invade nature and produce its complete destruction, just as life is extinguished and the body decomposed when any vital change enters into its delicate organism.

Our Savior depicts with vivid colors the awful picture of that general catastrophe. He describes the wonders that will occur in the stars of the firmament, those that will at the same time take place upon earth, and the fear of death overwhelming the people who will have the mis-

fortune to be living in those tremendous days. "The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light." Hence the whole earth will be enveloped in darkness. In the midst of this dismal obscurity will be seen the stars flickering like candles around a catafalque, and finally extinguishing and plunging with awful confusion through the realms of space.

Meanwhile our poor globe will become the target of the angry elements; the earth shaken by an unusual upheaval will be torn into profound abysses. The sea bounding over its natural limits, will drive its tempestuous waves over the dry land. The winds shall sweep away like sand the proud cities, and fire will pour down like a torrent from heaven devouring whatever remains. All this proud world will become a vast sepulchre where silence, solitude, and death will prevail and where the vengeance of God will reign supreme.

This is the melancholy fate awaiting so many famous works, so many renowned monuments of which man proudly boasted and in which he sought his happiness. All is destined to perish. It will be a repetition of what happened to proud Jerusalem when it fell into the power of the Roman foe who leveled it to the ground and slaughtered its inhabitants.

This great event, although extraordinary and unique of its kind, will be natural because effected by the very laws of nature. But the events immediately following the final catastrophe will be supernatural.

For, says the gospel, "the Lord shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds," that is, with His infinite power He shall recall to life all the defunct generations who shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty. We cannot imagine how imposing will be the pomp of this second advent of our Lord upon earth. This alone we do know, His enemies will be unable to endure the sight of this over-

whelming spectacle, for it will fill them with terror and dismay. We also know that the just shall be filled with admiration, joy, and supreme content; hence our Lord speaking to His Apostles who will be among that fortunate number, told them most affectionately: "When these things come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand." Yes, my faithful disciples, and all you who observe the new law of grace and of love, you will be able on that awful day confidently to fix your gaze upon me, knowing that you have finally reached the desired moment of your glorification and eternal happiness. All the struggles, dangers, and sorrows of your mortal life will terminate, and you will finally reach the dawn of a happy life that will never have an end. This blessed life, this kingdom of God, although it may seem a mysterious and remote event, will immediately follow the consummation of the world. In fact you may know for your consolation that between them there is the same necessary relation as the one existing between summer and spring. When the trees begin to put forth their leaves, when you see the earth carpeted with plants and flowers, you know that the summer season is not far distant. Likewise when you see these things come to pass, when you behold the earth in complete disorder, know that the kingdom of God is at hand, know that the moment has arrived when my elect shall commence to reign forever in glory. What does it matter if the foolish world seeks its happiness in the fleeting pleasure of the present life? What difference does it make, if it rejects my doctrines, scorns my promises, despises my threats, and even impugns the existence of a future life, of an eternal reward and an eternal punishment? So much the worse for it! Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by its false maxims. Do not let yourselves be seduced by its alluring flatteries. Listen with docility to the language of truth, having the firm conviction and unswerving faith that "heaven and earth

shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," because the utterance of God is never made in vain.

What impression is awakened in your soul by the light of these eternal truths which the Son of God announced to the world? Is it a light filling your mind with alarm, or one that fills your heart with joy?

But you may say that the announcement of the terrible signs preceding the world's destruction does not affect you, because death will prevent you from witnessing that awful catastrophe. Even so, death will not on that account prevent you from appearing before the tribunal of the Eternal Judge in order to be admitted or forever excluded from that blessed kingdom of which the end of the world will be the immediate preparation. Besides, it is not true that you will not be a spectator of the signs preceding the end of the world. Because these very signs will be repeated before your frightened gaze when death shall come to separate you from the world forever. Then indeed the light of the sun will be darkened to your eyes. Your disordered imagination will make you behold frightful spectres and scenes of horror that will appear to you as real. Your body about to dissolve will suffer all those spasmodic convulsions to which the earth itself will fall a victim in the last days of its existence. Your heart, your mind, and all the powers of your soul shall be shaken like a stormy sea by the tempestuous waves of remorse for the past, by so many hardships of the present, and by so much fear of the future. And immediately after the dissolution of the body shall not your soul perhaps behold the Son of God appearing in the clouds with great power and majesty? Shall not that be the very moment in which your glorification or perpetual reprobation shall take place? Will not that be the very moment in which you shall enter into the possession of the kingdom of God, or be banished from it for all eternity? These are truths which reason as well as faith renders manifest. Truths which, if well

considered, cannot allow your will to remain indifferent, but which ought powerfully to incite it to make some serious resolution.

We have before us an unavoidable temporary evil and an infinite good awaiting us beyond the tomb. We have a world which in spite of us must one day terminate. On the other hand, we have the kingdom of God, paradise opening its portals and inviting us to enter. What shall we do? If we have a grain of common sense, we should resolve to abandon the world with all its fallacious enticements. We should do all in our power to obtain possession of that blessed kingdom which will constitute our happiness throughout eternity. This wise counsel has been adopted by so many of our brethren who gladly trampled under foot all the vanities of earth, and crowned with light and immortal glory, now enjoy the happiness of heaven. This is the strong admonition given us by the Apostle of the Gentiles in his epistle to the Romans and read in to-day's Mass. " It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is passed and the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy, but put ye on the Lord, Jesus Christ." Treasure up these wise counsels, and you will be eternally happy.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

One day St. John the Baptist sent a delegation of his disciples to our Lord to ask Him: "Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?" From these words Tertullian, Justinus, and a few Protestant critics infer that St. John really doubted whether or not Jesus Christ was the promised Messias. "We cannot wonder," says Farrar, "if the eye of the caged eagle began to film. . . . To an untamed child of freedom like John, a prison was worse than death."

But long before his imprisonment St. John publicly testified to the divinity of Christ. For he baptized Him in the Jordan, and "saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him. And behold a voice from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Baptist himself declares: "I saw and gave testimony that this was the Son of God." He simply wished to overcome the obstinacy of his doubting disciples who refused to recognize Christ as the promised Redeemer. During this interview our Savior appealed to His public and well known miracles in proof of His divine mission. He took advantage of the occasion to eulogize His holy precursor in presence of all the people. He extolled in a special manner his heroic constancy and the austerity of his life. Let us therefore listen to His divine word with profound reverence. Like the disciples of the Baptist, many of us perhaps need to animate our faith too often shaken by the tempest of incredulity raging in the world at the present day. Let us also strengthen our weak virtue after the example of that great model of the desert concerning whom our Lord declared: "There hath not risen greater born of woman."

I

Of course everybody at all familiar with the Bible knows who John the Baptist was and the reason of his incarceration. The son of Zachary and Elizabeth, he was the pioneer divinely chosen to prepare the way of the Redeemer. He was that most holy man who spent his life in the desert, whose raiment consisted of camel's hair, whose food were locusts and wild honey. He was that extraordinary individual who on the banks of the Jordan preached penance to the multitudes of Israel. He had the exalted privilege of pointing out the adorable person of our Redeemer, and of baptizing Him. But why should one so holy be cast into prison? Is not the penitentiary the domicile of criminals? John languished in chains, not by reason of any crime committed, but on account of his heroic virtue. He was imprisoned because he had courageously denounced the incestuous conduct of Herod, and had boldly told him that it was not lawful to live with the wife of his brother to the great scandal of the nation. John was jailed because he wished to fulfil his duty, the arduous duty of giving testimony to the truth, of announcing unpleasant truths to those in power who desire to be flattered even in their iniquity. Another John, the Vicar of Christ and Visible Head of His Church, is held prisoner in the Vatican for a similar reason, because he undertook to combat the revolution, and ceases not to cry out to his enemies: It is not lawful. The same thing happened to all the saints and martyrs who have been persecuted by the world, imprisoned and subjected to a thousand torments, because by word and example they vigorously opposed the torrent of iniquity. The same fate awaits all zealous pastors of souls, if they wish to fulfil the arduous duties of their calling. The wicked not being of God, do not wish to hear the voice of His ministers. Hence their fury knows no bounds when they behold themselves opposed and contradicted in their per-

verse desires. With menaces and even violence they strive to intimidate the ministers of the sanctuary. But comforted by the example of the Baptist, by the object lesson of all the saints, and by our gloriously reigning Pontiff, we do not fear the intimidation of impious men. In fact their very opposition stimulates our strength and courage to fulfil our duties with greater energy. When persecuted by the world we have reason to be consoled and to rejoice. We then can hope with some foundation to be the true followers and faithful ministers of Christ, for we know that He calls those blessed who suffer persecution for the sake of justice.

John therefore sent to Christ some of his disciples to ask Him: Art thou the Messias promised by God for the salvation of the world, or is he still to come? At first sight it would appear that the Baptist doubted whether Jesus were really the promised Redeemer. Such, however, was not the case. John could not doubt of this great truth, because we know that one day pointing our Savior out to the multitude, he exclaimed: "Behold the lamb of God, behold Him Who taketh away the sins of the world." He could not doubt, for he had heard with his ears that explicit testimony from heaven: "This is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him." It was his disciples who doubted this important truth. Hence he sent them to Jesus in order that they might explain their doubts and come away enlightened. In his name he sent them to question our Lord, as they would not perhaps venture to question Him on their own authority.

What reply did the Savior make to their inquiries? He said: "Go and relate to John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again; the poor have the gospel preached to them and blessed is he who is not scandalized in me."

He did not direct them to go and tell John that he *was* the promised Redeemer, a fact of which John was fully

cognizant. Had He simply replied to them in the affirmative, they might have been tempted to conclude in the words of the unbelieving Jews: "Thou givest testimony of thyself; thy testimony is nothing."

He therefore appeals to His works, says St. Chrysostom, for the testimony of works is stronger than that of words.

His answer was peremptory and convincing. There was question of showing that He was really the Son of God, and He proves it by miracles that are exclusively and pre-eminently the work of God. It was as if He said: God alone can work miracles; but as you see, I perform many miracles. Therefore I am God. What could they oppose to an argument so simple and at the same time so evident?

"The poor have the gospel preached to them." Our Savior alludes here to the prophecy of Isaias: "He hath sent me to preach to the weak, to bind up the broken hearted." St. Jerome understands in this passage, not those who are poverty stricken by necessity, but by voluntary selection, the weak and humble of heart. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God." Poverty is no crime, nor is wealth. In fact the latter is a signal of blessing, no matter what ranting demagogues may say to the contrary. Only the inordinate love of riches is sinful. Joseph of Arimathea and Zaccheus, although wealthy, were followers of Jesus Christ. They employed their riches to alleviate the wants of the poor. The fact of our Savior's preaching His gospel to the poor, though not a miracle, was nevertheless a fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy made by Isaias (lxi, 1). "And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me." This admonition was intended, not for John, but for his doubting disciples whose faith might be shaken by our Lord's humble manner and appearance. In spite of all His miracles, many abandoned Him on account of His poverty, His sufferings, His ignominious death upon the cross,

which proved a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.

II

"And when they went their way, Jesus began to speak to the multitudes concerning John." Our Savior did not praise John in presence of the latter's disciples, very likely to avoid all appearance of flattery and to prevent the faintest suspicion that by means of praise He was trying to win John's favor. In praising others we should imitate our Lord's prudence and discretion, thus removing from the person praised all temptation to vanity and self-conceit.

After the departure of the messengers, our Lord began to say to the multitudes: "What went you out in the desert to see? a reed shaken by the wind?" viz. a trivial, inconstant man who allows himself to be swayed by the wind of human opinions and who has no stability of character? Had John been such a creature, he might easily have changed his prison for a palace, his sufferings and degradation for pleasures and honors. It would have sufficed to have shown himself a little less austere with the dissolute monarch, and without sanctioning his incestuous conduct, he might have abstained from reproving him. He might have simply placed upon his tongue that check counseled by the carnal prudence of the world, and thus he would have enjoyed Herod's grace and favor. But just because he showed himself inflexible and uncompromising in fearlessly proclaiming the truth to those in power, he lost both liberty and life. Rare indeed are these most noble examples in the midst of a cowardly, fawning, and egotistic world! People nowadays sacrifice their innermost convictions and trample under foot the most sacred duties in order to comply with the iniquitous exigencies of the times.

Continuing His discourse our Savior said: "But what went you out to see, a man clothed in soft garments?

Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings." People gorgeously attired do not dwell in the wilderness like St. John, but in palatial residences. John's garments were not very soft, but rather coarse and rough. "He was clothed with camel's hair and a leathern girdle about his loins." The coarse habit and sandals of the mendicant orders were no doubt suggested by the rigid example of the Baptist. Mortification engenders virtue, while luxury causes its death.

How many whose greatest anxiety is what they shall eat and wear — forgetting the admonition of our Savior: "Be not solicitous for your life, what ye shall eat nor for your body what you shall put on. Is not life more than the meat, and the body more than the raiment? Is not the soul more than the body, since the body is the raiment of the soul? Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." (Matt. iv.) If John's diet of locusts and wild honey be a condemnation of excess in food, his austere costume of camel's hair is a warning against extravagance in dress. This childish passion, this feminine weakness for ornamenting the body while neglecting to decorate the soul with Christian virtues, is like placing the costly furniture in the front yard, leaving the parlor empty and barren. To this class of weaklings John certainly did not belong. He was a magnanimous character, an heroic soul. He was a prophet, in fact more than a prophet. He not only foretold the coming of Christ, but pointed Him out as actually present. He was more than a prophet, because he had a clearer and more intimate knowledge of Christ than all the other prophets taken collectively. He was more than a prophet, for of him it was written by Malachy: "Behold I send my angel before my face, who shall prepare the way before thee." He is called an angel not only because he was the precursor of the Son of God, but also on account of his perpetual virginity, which is designated as the angelic virtue. (Mark xii.) This was

the splendid eulogy that Christ made of John the Baptist, — a eulogy that compensated him for all his sufferings, even that of death itself which he bravely underwent for the sake of justice, a eulogy surpassing all the grandeur and honor he might have received from the world, had he placed himself under its abominable standard.

From his example let us learn never to abandon the holy cause of justice and truth through fear of losing the esteem of men. Let us not be pliant as reeds shaken by the wind of every temptation, but constant in the fulfilment of our duties. Although we cannot follow literally the austere example of the Baptist, we can at least avoid immoderation in food and drink as well as extravagance in dress. Let us courageously live up to the teachings of our holy religion, assured that we shall receive God's approbation and be crowned by Him with glory in eternity.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

To-day's Gospel records a critical period in the career of St. John the Baptist. Our attention is drawn to his extraordinary virtues in order that we may reproduce them in ourselves. Although he was not the light, yet before the manifestation of the Incarnate Word to the people, the multitudes were to hear and follow the voice of John the Baptist, because he gave testimony of the light. Last Sunday's Gospel tells us of an embassy sent by John to Jesus Christ; to-day the Scribes and Pharisees send a delegation of priests and levites to John. Last Sunday we heard the splendid eulogy which our Savior made of John. He extolled his heroic constancy and the austerity of his life, declaring that he was not a reed shaken by the wind, nor a man clothed in soft garments. In fact there hath not risen greater born of woman. The narrative of this morning's gospel affords an opportunity of admiring his sincerity, his humility, and his faith, virtues indeed noble, but exceedingly rare in the deceitful, proud, and incredulous world at the present day.

I

Great excitement prevailed at that time in Judea regarding the promised Redeemer. Many prophetic signs of His advent were probably recognized by the supreme Jewish Council. Daniel had foretold that the Messias would come after seventy weeks of years. That prophetic interval was then completed. The patriarch Jacob had predicted that the sceptre would not depart from the tribe of his son Judah until the Messiah's advent. The sceptre of authority had already passed from the tribe of Judah into the hands of Herod, an Idumean who ruled then over the Jews.

While the children of Israel were thus anxiously expecting the promised Messias, John the Baptist made his appearance. The wonderful circumstances attending his birth, the ministry of his father Zachary in the temple, his extraordinary mode of living and preaching aroused universal comment among the people. They began thinking that perhaps he might be the Christ. The Sanhedrim of Jerusalem therefore sent an important commission to wait on John in order to obtain from him a formal declaration that would remove all uncertainty and set their minds at rest in regard to a matter of vital importance.

Perceiving the motive of their inquiries, John hastens to prevent all attempts at honor being thrust upon him. He declares in most precise terms: "I am not the Christ," as if implicitly asserting that someone else not far distant who is the Christ had already appeared.

Then the deputation, in order to obtain definite knowledge regarding his personality, asked him: "What then? Art thou Elias?" This question probably arose from their false interpretation of Malachy's prophecy (iv, 5): "Behold, I will send you Elias, the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," viz. before the general judgment. The Scribes did not distinguish between the first and second advent of the Messiah. They thought that whenever he came, he would be preceded by the prophet Elias.

The angel Gabriel declared to Zachary in the temple that John would precede the Messias in the spirit and power of Elias. Alluding to the Baptist our Lord said: "Elias is already come, and they know him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they had a mind." How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction between our Lord and the Baptist? According to Gregory the Great, the Baptist was filled with the spirit and virtue of Elias, but was not Elias the Thesbite in person. St. John then was right in denying that he was Elias in person, and Christ was right in calling him Elias in reference to the spirit

and virtue for which he was conspicuous, and also on account of his office of precursor. He was the Elias or herald of Christ's first advent, just as Elias will be the precursor of his last coming on earth.

"Art thou the prophet?" viz. the one mentioned by Moses. "The Lord, thy God will raise up to thee a prophet . . . him thou shalt hear." The prophet was no other than Jesus Christ, as may be inferred from the Acts (iii, 22). The Jews imagined that the text referred to a precursor of Christ. From a spirit of humility John denied being a prophet in the sense of their question. Strictly speaking he was not a prophet, as he did not foretell the occurrence of a future event. Yet our Lord declared him to be more than a prophet. He did not predict the future advent of the Messiah, like the other prophets, but he did more by pointing Him out as actually present.

We cannot help admiring his rare trait of candor, and we should learn from John to shun the detestable vice of duplicity. Some people think that they are allowed to deceive whenever it may be advantageous. Were such the case, the Baptist by a little deception could have had himself honored as the Messiah. He might have drawn to himself the enthusiasm and honor of the Jewish nation which was impatiently awaiting its Redeemer. He teaches us that we can never sacrifice truth for personal gain, and that it is unlawful to deceive others in order to promote our own interests. He shows us by his example that even though an untruth may seem profitable in the beginning, it invariably turns out hurtful in the end. Even had he momentarily succeeded in posing as the expected Messiah, this ephemeral glory would speedily change to disgrace and infamy, while he owed all his greatness to the truth which he sincerely professed.

II

So far John had denied that he was Christ, Elias, or any other prophet. But he had not yet stated who he

really was, and that was precisely what the messengers of the Sanhedrim wished to ascertain. They therefore said to him: "Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?" Notice the profound humility of his answer. He might have replied: I am not Christ, but His precursor. It will be my privilege to baptize Him in the Jordan, and point Him out to the multitude. All this he might have truthfully asserted, but his singular modesty would not allow him to make a parade of his merits, his glory, and great destiny. Clothing his answer with the veil of humility, he replied: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias." John is the voice predicted by the prophet. Christ is the word for which the voice is the preparation. His candor and simplicity remind us to speak the truth on all occasions. Yet how much deception is daily practised in every business, trade, and profession! How many do not scruple to perjure their souls, if thereby may be gained any temporal advantage!

"Make straight the way of the Lord." In ancient times there were but few highways, and like some of our modern thoroughfares, they were usually in bad condition. When a sovereign contemplated visiting his subjects, it was customary to repair the rough and crooked roads beforehand by grading the abrupt elevations and filling up the hollows. The mission of the Baptist was to make straight the way of the Lord into the hearts of His people by inciting them to works of penance and to the removal of every obstacle that might hinder them from accepting Him as the promised Redeemer.

"And they that were sent were of the Pharisees." They formed the most powerful party of the Sanhedrim. They interpreted the law and decided all theological discussions. Being well versed in Holy Scripture, they knew that the Messias and prophets immediately preceding Him would baptize the people, according to Ezekiel: "I

will pour upon you clean water and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness." Piqued perhaps at the answers of John who each time grew more abrupt —" I am not the Christ; I am not; NO!" the Pharisees demanded why he should usurp a prerogative belonging exclusively to the Messias. " Why then dost thou baptize if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, nor the prophet?"

In his reply the Baptist humbles himself and exalts his Divine Master by acknowledging that his baptism was merely to excite them to penance, and by implicitly asserting that the baptism of Christ would be of a nature infinitely superior, for it would cleanse the spirit. " There hath stood one in the midst of you whom you know not, viz. Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God . . . the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose." He still stands in our midst by means of His church, His sacraments, and graces. But many, like the faithless Jews, ignore both Him and His doctrine.

Such was the faith of John the Baptist in Christ to come. Very probably he had as yet never seen our Lord in person, nor did he have immediate communication with Him. He knew only through the illumination of divine grace the profound mystery of the Incarnation. He firmly believed that this Man-God, Savior of the world had already appeared, and that the moment of His public manifestation was rapidly approaching. Such also is the faith of the genuine Christian in the truths of divine revelation. He believes in the existence of a future life, in the general judgment, heaven and hell, in the efficacy of the sacraments, in the divine authority of a teaching Church, and reasons about all these tenets of religion better than if he saw them with his eyes, or touched them with his hands. There is the beautiful example afforded us by the Baptist, the first and most perfect of all Christians. Imitate him in his admirable virtues. Be truthful, humble, and believing. Thus you will be worthy disciples

of Him Who is called pre-eminently the truth, the way, and the life, of Him Who is meek and humble of heart, of Him Who promises eternal life to all that firmly believe. "He that believeth shall be saved."

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

At the period in which Almighty God deigned to accomplish the great mystery of man's redemption, deplorable indeed was the political and religious condition of Judea, the theatre of that wonderful event. From the list of rulers quoted by the Evangelist we are apprised of the exact epoch in which St. John the Baptist began to preach. He records the beginning of John's mission with reference to the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, the Roman Emperor. He wished thereby to show that the Messias appeared upon earth exactly at the time foretold by the Patriarchs and Prophets. Jacob predicted that the departure of the sceptre from the tribe of Judah would be an evident sign of the Messiah's advent. Now when Christ was born the sceptre of authority had already departed from the tribe of Judah. Judea having lost its independence became a Roman province under the domination of Tiberius Cæsar who governed it through his proconsuls. They were given, as if through irony, the title of kings or tetrarchs. Judea was dismembered into small districts. Judea proper was governed by Pontius Pilate, Galilee by Herod, while his brother Philip ruled Iturea, Abilene, and Lisania. They all were princes resembling the great Cæsar and perhaps even excelling him in profligacy and corruption.

If the political state of the Jewish nation was at that time deplorable, its religious condition was still worse. The office of high-priest was then filled by Caiphas — he who later pronounced the sentence of death against the Son of God. Let us see what remedy our Lord employed to bring this erring people back to the road of salvation — a remedy which is also for us of absolute necessity.

I

The remedy which our Savior employed to heal the moral infirmities of the Jewish nation seemed quite ordinary and rather inept from a human standpoint, but in the hands of God it became infallibly efficacious. It was the preaching of a rough, uneducated man, whose pronouncements were devoid of elegance, literary style, or the usual ornaments of human eloquence. Such a man, it would seem, might irritate his hearers rather than captivate their minds and conquer their hearts. But this man was sent from God and spoke to his audience in the name of God. He did not attempt to regale them with his personal views on currents events, the gossip or sensation of the hour, but announced the plain, unvarnished truth. "Ye brood of vipers," he said to the Pharisees, "who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of penance." His voice resounded vigorous and powerful in the midst of a people addicted to vice and buried in superstition. He aroused on all sides a fervent desire to correct sinful habits and reform life. For this reason the inhabitants of Judea "went out to him in the desert and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." They listened with mute and reverential awe to the salutary message that fell from his lips, and publicly embraced that penance which he declared an indispensable means for obtaining eternal life. There is the medicine which our Savior used at that period and even long before it, the remedy in fact which He employs at the present day for the salvation of mankind: the preaching of His Gospel.

It is important that you engrave deeply in your hearts this great truth: "Faith cometh by hearing," and the preaching of it is absolutely necessary. No man can save his soul who refuses to listen to the word of God. Hence our Lord appointed priests in His Church in order that like so many other Johns they should announce to the

people the great truths of faith. Upon them He imposed the solemn obligation—"Going therefore teach all nations." To the nations, He said: Hear them, because he who hears the priests, hears myself; he who despises the priests, despises my own person. "He that heareth you, heareth me; he that despiseth you, despiseth me." True, we are ignorant, we are filled with misery and imperfections, we are subject to human frailties the same as the rest of men. But what difference? The Lord commanded us to teach. He wishes us to go wherever He sends us, teaching all things whatsoever He commanded. He has said to us: I will give you speech and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to resist. What imparts authority and strength to our words is the divine commission, not indeed the colorings of human eloquence, fecundity of expression, genius, reputation, or moral integrity. If then our mission be altogether divine, if we speak to you in the name of God Who commands us to do so, every Christian must listen to us with attention, and hear us precisely because we are God's messengers and ministers. It matters little that we be men of mediocre talents, ordinary intelligence, and that even some of us be not alluringly edifying in our conduct; upon you devolves the duty of hearing our words, because the doctrine we announce, is not ours but His Who sent us. For this reason our Lord speaking one day to the multitude of the Scribes and Pharisees, and of the exalted office they held, viz. teaching religious truth and expounding the law, said: "They have sat on the chair of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do: but according to their works do ye not: for they say and do not." (Matt. xxiii, 2.) There is really the just idea you should entertain of the preaching of the gospel. You should abstract from the character of the man who speaks and pay attention only to the priestly office which he fills. What shall we say of those who feel a dislike for the word of God, who positively refuse to attend a sermon unless

assured beforehand that the preacher is another Bossuet or Lacordaire, a pulpit orator of the first magnitude? They suffer the days consecrated to God to pass by unprofitably. Contenting themselves with a low Mass on Sundays, they assist at it with distracted minds, without devotion and without prayer. So great is their anxiety to hasten back to their commercial pursuits or worldly pleasures that they invariably find the divine service too long, and dread lest the priest should detain them with sermon or exhortation! The faith of such is weak and vacillating; the state of their salvation is indeed precarious. When a patient shows nausea for nourishment and refuses it, the hope of his recovery is not encouraging. Now we know that the word of God is our spiritual food, as our Lord Himself declared: "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." (Matt. iv, 6.)

We can only repeat what our Divine Redeemer already proclaimed. "He that is of God, heareth the word of God." Why then are some unwilling to hear it? Simply because they are not of God, but rather children of the evil one.

The word of God announced by His ministers will turn to your advantage. It will teach you the sublime truths of faith that enlighten the mind; it will inculcate the salutary maxims of morality that sanctify the heart; it will rescue you from the mire of iniquity and place you upon the path of virtue leading to eternal life. Do you know on the other hand what is seducing, corrupting, and destroying the present generation? It is the word of sinful man, the suggestions of libertines, of wicked companions that poison the mind, corrupt the heart, and drag soul and body to perdition. Shun then with horror the accursed maxims of the world, and listen always with rapt attention to the salutary word of God. Thus you may confidently hope to possess one day His heavenly kingdom.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

In compliance with the Mosaic law the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph brought the Divine Infant to the temple of Jerusalem in order to offer Him to God as their first born, and to pay the price of His legal redemption. Evidently Jesus was not bound to fulfil this legal observance. "For if," says St. Hilary, "the son of a king and the heir of his crown is exempt from slavery, with how much greater reason was Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the world, free from the obligation of redeeming Himself?" Both He and His Blessed Mother observed the law in order to remove all occasion of scandal to the Jews and to give us an example of humility and obedience. The Church has embodied into her liturgy this rite of purification commonly known as the churching of women. Although in no sense obligatory, Christian mothers follow this laudable custom of presenting themselves at the altar rail soon after the birth of their children in order to thank God for their motherhood. They donate a couple of wax candles to the altar and receive a special blessing prescribed in the ritual.

On the occasion of our Lord's presentation in the temple Simeon and Anna prophesied regarding His future life and character. It was certainly an impressive scene full of meaning from which we may draw a few practical lessons.

I

Calvin would have Simeon a man of obscure origin and reputation. But his opinion is diametrically opposed to to the Evangelist's assertion that Simeon was just and

devout and the Holy Ghost was in him. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and had received divine assurance that he should not see death until after he had beheld the promised Redeemer. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he entered the temple just at the time the Holy Family was complying with the Mosaic ceremonies of purification. He immediately recognized in the Divine Infant of Nazareth the object of his fondest hopes and longings. Taking Him up in his arms, and his heart overflowing with joy, he uttered that beautiful canticle indicative of a soul entirely free from earthly attachments: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation." (Luke ii, 29.)

"And Simeon blessed them." Strictly speaking, God alone can impart a blessing, for all spiritual and temporal goods come from His infinite bounty. Simeon did not presume to bless Jesus Whom he knew to be God. Still there would have been no incongruity in his doing so, if thereby we understand simply a form of praise and congratulation. In this sense the psalmist exclaimed: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." When God blesses man, He confers upon him some temporal or spiritual favor. When man blesses his fellowman, the blessing is equivalent to a prayerful desire that God may bestow a temporal or spiritual benefit.

"And said to Mary His mother," rather than to Joseph who was only His foster father, whereas she was really His mother. Moreover St. Joseph probably died before the verification of those prophecies.

"Behold this child is set for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel." Our Lord was set as the foundation in the spiritual edifice of His Church, indirectly for the fall and spiritual ruin of many in Israel, owing to their own perversity and obstinate rejection of His preaching and mission. But He was set directly for the resurrection of many from the spiritual death of sin to a life of sanctity

here upon earth and to a life of eternal happiness hereafter. This was directly intended by God as the effect of Christ's coming, while the fall of many through their own perversity of heart was simply permitted.

"And for a sign which shall be contradicted." Sign is here equivalent to prodigy. Our Lord's birth, His miracles, passion, and resurrection formed one great prodigy which many believed, but which many also contradicted by calumniating, persecuting, and finally nailing Him to a cross. He has continued to be a mark of contradiction not only to heretics and infidels but also to profligate Christians who offend Him by mortal sin.

"And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." When beholding the sufferings of her Divine Son upon the cross her soul was pierced by a sword of grief and sorrow. Hence she is styled "Queen of Martyrs" in the litany. What the Son endured in His sacred Body, the Mother experienced in her heart at the contemplation of His crucifixion. Her sorrows have frequently furnished a theme to the poet and the artist. The Stabat Mater touchingly describes her grief. When our separated brethren happen to run across one of those paintings which depict the heart of the Blessed Virgin pierced by seven swords, instead of passing it by with a sneer, they might ask some Catholic friend to explain to them its symbolic meaning. They would be told politely that the swords represent her seven sorrows occasioned by the prophecy of Simeon, by the flight into Egypt, the loss of Jesus in the temple, meeting Him on the way to Calvary, His Crucifixion, His descent from the cross, and His burial.

"That out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." The divine tragedy enacted on Calvary — the sight of the crucified Redeemer, His Virgin Mother transfixed with grief at the foot of the cross — caused many, like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, St. John, and the holy women, to reveal their faith by the sympathy they publicly manifested.

II

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Aser." In Hebrew Anna means grace — certainly a most appropriate name for one conspicuous for piety. Her father's name was Phanuel, which signifies the face of God. Hence Jacob gave the name of Phanuel to the locality in which he beheld God face to face. (Gen. xxxii, 30.) She descended from the tribe of Aser, which means blessed. These details of her parental lineage distinguish her from all other women bearing the same name and give additional weight to her testimony.

"She was far advanced in years," not likely therefore to be giddy and frivolous, or carried away by youthful enthusiasm. "And had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity," viz., from the time of puberty which oriental women usually reach at the age of 14.

"And she was a widow until four score and four years." She was indeed a model for her sex of whatever age or condition. For married women she sets an example of conjugal fidelity. She loved her husband so devotedly that after his demise she spent the remainder of her days in prayer and fasting. She led a mortified life, finding her greatest delight in the house of God, "who departed not from the temple, by fastings and by prayers serving night and day." "A widow that prays not," says St. Paul, "but lives in pleasures, is dead while she is living." Fasting disposes us for prayer, while excessive indulgence renders us unfit for this holy exercise.

"Now she at the same hour coming in confessed to the Lord,"— that is, she confirmed Simeon's testimony by praising God for having sent His Son to redeem the world. Had she not come into the temple "at the same hour," she would not have beheld the Divine Infant. God's grace is given to us on special occasions. The time of a mission, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the Forty Hours

are privileged opportunities upon which may depend our salvation.

"And spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." If we really love Jesus Christ, we will frequently think and speak of Him, not in blasphemy and imprecations, but in praise and reverence. From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. When we hear men rivaling each other in obscenity we may infer that it is not Christ but the demon of impurity that reigns in their hearts.

"After they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord,"— viz., after the legal purification of the Blessed Virgin, the presentation and redemption of the Divine Infant in the temple,—"they returned to Galilee, to their city Nazareth. And the child grew and waxed strong, full of wisdom and the grace of God was in him." The Father guided all the movements of His beloved Son in Whom He was well pleased. The Evangelist emphasizes the reality of His human nature against the gnostics who asserted that Christ had no real body. The child grew in size and His limbs became strengthened with the gradual development of His body.

From to-day's gospel we should learn to cultivate the virtues of humility and obedience. Jesus and Mary cheerfully complied with all the Mosaic precepts, though they were in no way bound to do so. What an example of filial obedience to wayward children who totally disregard parental authority! Let us so regulate *our* daily actions that they may never be in contradiction to the teachings of our Divine Redeemer. Let us resolve not to contradict His humility by our pride, His obedience by our rebellion, His poverty by our luxury, His fasting by our gluttony, His purity by our sensuality, His sanctity by our sinfulness. Then we may confidently hope that He will be set, not for our fall, but for our future glorious resurrection.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Three events of our Savior's childhood are recorded in to-day's gospel. At the age of twelve He went with Mary and Joseph to attend the Paschal feast in Jerusalem. When they departed for home He remained in the temple, where He was subsequently found after a three days' search, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. Nowadays the temple would be about the last place in the world to look for a lost child. He returned to Nazareth with His parents and was subject to them.

The term Pasch in Hebrew means to pass over. Pasch or Passover in the Old Law, corresponding to the Christion Easter, was a festival commemorating the providential escape of the Jews from one of the plagues of Egypt. As Pharaoh would not permit the Israelites to go and offer sacrifice to God in the desert, both he and his people were punished by the death of their first-born child. To escape this plague the Jews were commanded to eat unleavened bread for the space of seven days, to eat a lamb of a year old, and to sprinkle their doorposts with its blood. The destroying angel smote the first-born of the Egyptians but *passed over* the houses of the Israelites which were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.

The fact of our Savior instituting the Holy Eucharist on the vigil of the Pasch leads us to infer that He used unleavened bread. During the celebration of that festival only unleavened bread could be obtained in Israel, according to the ceremonial precept: "Seven days there shall not be found any leaven in your houses." (Ex. xii, 18.) Let us briefly examine to-day's gospel which affords both old and young abundant matter for reflection.

I

"And when Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast," the Passover or Pasch, as the preceding verse informs us.

"And his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Pasch." Parents are here reminded to take their children with them to church on Sundays and holidays of obligation. Just as soon as they acquire the use of reason, which generally comes to them at the age of seven, they are bound to hear Mass, to abstain from flesh on Fridays and on other days of abstinence. In a word, they are obliged, just the same as adults, to observe the precepts of the Church. Hence parents and guardians become guilty of gross negligence by authorizing or tolerating the absence of their children from Sunday Mass, annual confession and Easter Communion after the latter begin to know the difference between right and wrong.

The Holy Family undertook a tedious journey of 70 miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem, in order to attend the religious festival. Persons living but a short distance from the church remain away from the Holy Sacrifice for the slightest pretext. A little rain or snow will keep them from the House of God, but never from places of amusement. Mary and Joseph celebrated the Pasch for seven days. Nowadays people find Divine Service altogether too long. Although it rarely exceeds an hour, some find even that too much time to devote to God and hurriedly leave the church before the service terminates. Begrudgingly they give a few moments of their time to the rehearsal of the Divine tragedy of Calvary at the foot of the altar, but they can sit patiently through several hours of comedy and buffoonery in a theatre. No time for religious worship, but time in abundance for dancing and dissipation which may last until the gray dawn of morning!

At the end of the Paschal feast Mary and Joseph set out for Nazareth. Unknown to them the child Jesus remained behind in order to manifest a ray of His wisdom and to begin even then His mission of teacher and Redeemer. Thinking that He had started home before them in the company of relatives and neighbors whom they would overtake at the halting place, his parents journeyed on an entire day before discovering his absence. Not finding Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances, they concluded that He had remained in Jerusalem. They therefore retraced their steps, hoping to find Him in the Holy City.

"And it came to pass that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions."

They did not find Him on the street corners or in questionable company, where some young people are usually found, but in the temple. We will never find Him in frivolous society or gatherings where He is offended, but we can always find Him in the church, in the sacrament of His Love, the Holy Eucharist.

During His three days' sojourn in Jerusalem, the doctors and others astounded at His wisdom, very likely supplied Him with food and shelter. This seems more probable than the opinion of SS. Bernard and Thomas who imagined that He must have begged His necessaries from door to door like an ordinary mendicant, according to the Psalmist: "But I am a beggar and poor." (xxxix, 18.)

Being the way, the truth, and the life, our Savior could not be taught by any man. He therefore questioned the Jewish doctors, not for the purpose of receiving information, but in order that He would in turn be questioned by them, and through His answers impart instruction. Only an erudite person can both ask and answer questions wisely. Hence it follows that, "All that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers." They were amazed to see a child of twelve, who had never frequented

the schools, so versed in Holy Scripture. His parents seeing Him, also wondered. "And His mother said to Him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." These words are rather a respectful complaint proceeding from an affectionate mother's heart, whereby she indicates their intense grief at His temporary loss. Her question is in no sense a reproach since our Lord was blameless. She sought Him, sorrowing, not because she thought Him lost, since she knew He was God, but because she was His mother, and He had left her suddenly without her knowledge.

She calls St. Joseph, the father of Jesus; "thy father and I," humbly mentioning him first and concealing the dignity of her divine maternity. Although she lost Him through no fault of hers, she sought Him sorrowing. Let us imitate her example by seeking Him with true sorrow in the tribunal of penance *when* we unfortunately lose Him through mortal sin.

II

The very first words recorded in Scripture of our Savior are a filial conversation with His parents about His heavenly Father. "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" Our Lord here indicates that their sorrow was occasioned partly through their love of Him, and partly through their ignorance of the mystery just revealed, viz. that He should be occupied with His divine mission.

His actions were of a twofold character. Some which He had in common with all men, as e. g. to eat, sleep, walk, and so on; others which were characteristic of the God-Man, i. e. working miracles, teaching and redeeming mankind. In his merely human actions He wished to obey His parents and be ruled by them. But in His divine works He desired to be subject to His heavenly Father. Observe well, however, that Christ though subject to the

Father, according to His human nature, was not subject, but equal to the Father in Divinity.

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth and was subject to them." What an admirable example of obedience! The Master becomes subject to His parents, the Creator obedient to His creatures! That subjection undoubtedly extended to the most menial services of the household. His foster father was a carpenter, and the Divine Child assisted and obeyed him in the workshop. He was obedient to Mary in domestic affairs. What a contrast He affords to the disobedient, stubborn, and impudent children of the present day! Our Savior's obedience lasted not simply for a week or a month, but during thirty years of His life. What a marvellous example of humility!

"And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men." From the first instant of His conception, He was full of grace and wisdom. By reason of the personal union of His human nature with the Eternal Word He was entitled to these prerogatives from the very beginning of His Incarnation. He therefore could not really increase those gifts. He simply gave them greater manifestation as He advanced in years, just as the sun although never augmenting its light, yet the higher it ascends and approaches the zenith, the more effulgent become its illuminating rays. Do we also advance in virtue as we progress in years? Do we not rather retrograde? Did we not possess greater piety and devotion, more charity and forbearance than we have at the present day? Although we cannot become perfect in this vale of tears, we are commanded to strive at least after perfection. "Be ye perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect." The older we grow the better we should become. There is no one but can easily find room for improvement. Let us endeavor then to discharge our duties with greater zeal and fidelity. Thus like the Divine Child we may advance in grace and wisdom

before God and men, according as we progress in years. In this manner we shall at least acquire that degree of perfection sufficient to obtain for us the crown of eternal life.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

After reading this morning's gospel we find it hard to decide which causes our greater admiration, the miraculous power of our Lord, or the wonderful influence wielded over Him by His Blessed Mother. To suspend the laws of nature, to compel them to deviate from their ordinary course, belongs exclusively to the Author of nature. But to influence and direct the heart of Him Who can perform such prodigies seems to be a prerogative equally great and astounding. Yet that is what we behold realized in the miracle of to-day's gospel.

Our Lord having been invited to the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee, wrought His first miracle by changing the water into wine. But it was the Blessed Virgin persuading and compelling Him, as it were, by her efficacious prayer to anticipate the hour of His public manifestation, and to do what seemed against His will. It is Mary who commands the Lord and Master of nature. Let us go back in spirit to the marriage feast of Cana, and sitting at the table with our Divine Redeemer, let us nourish our minds with the substantial bread of truth which He gives us.

I

A bridal couple, very probably relatives of our Divine Lord, celebrated their wedding according to Jewish custom with a frugal banquet. The Blessed Virgin and her Divine Son were among the number of invited guests! It may appear rather astonishing to find our Lord and His Blessed Mother at a wedding feast. But after all it was most natural and becoming for them to be there. For what are nuptials and what is marriage? To this

question the materialist and infidel will reply that it is simply a civil contract following the regulations of all other contracts. A man and woman agree to live together under certain reciprocal conditions. On that account the woman passes into the power of the husband just as any merchandize by an act of sale becomes the property of the purchaser. But the language of faith and reason is altogether different. If we consider the origin of marriage, we see that it is derived directly from God. He established it at the very beginning of the world's creation when He uttered these solemn words: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help mate like unto himself." (Gen. ii.) And thus was created the first woman and the Lord blessed this first bridal couple that should be the type and model of all future ones, and He said: "Increase and multiply." But as Christians we must add that the Incarnate Word of God raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, thereby placing it among the holiest of religious institutions. He made it an image of that mystic union which He celebrated with His church. Christian marriage thus became an outward sign or figure of inward grace. "The husband," says St. Paul, "is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it." Now marriage could not represent the union of Christ with His Church, and impose special obligations on the married couple, unless it also gave them grace to fulfil those obligations. Since therefore Christ made Christian marriage a figure or representation of His ineffable union with the Church, like the other sacraments, it must be really a sign instituted by Him, and productive of grace. Hence the Apostle calls it a great sacrament, or mystery in Christ and in the Church. Thus among us Christians the marriage contract and the sacrament are not distinct. They are one

and the same thing. Among Christians no one can be validly united in marriage without receiving at the same time the sacrament which is inseparable from it. Hence it must be received in Church, with the Church's intervention, and in the manner prescribed by the Church. Any other union of Catholics different from this would be nothing short of a disgraceful concubinage.

While the State may legislate regarding the amount of dowry, inheritance of property, legal obligations of husband and wife, in a word, concerning the civil effects of the marriage contract, the Church alone established by Christ has the right to enact laws regarding the sacrament of matrimony. No judge then can rightfully declare a valid Christian marriage null and void, any more than he can nullify baptism, confirmation, or holy orders. He might as well endeavor to invalidate the words of consecration or the absolution of the priest. The indissolubility of Christian marriage is the result, not of human, but of divine legislation. And "what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

If the family is the basis of society, the sacrament forming the family must evidently be the foundation of the social edifice. In raising marriage to a sacramental dignity, our Savior raised society also, thus enabling it to attain that intellectual superiority which distinguishes Christian nations. Unity, indissolubility and sanctity were the characteristics of the primitive family. Developing itself according to its principles, the family should give birth to a perfect society. Unfortunately the original disorder overthrew the divine plan. Polygamy and divorce, breaking up primitive unity, introduced jealousy, rancour and unhappiness into the family. Concupiscence, shutting out every idea of holiness, reduced husband and wife to the level of brutes. And from the domestic hearth came forth swarms of malevolent beings. Degraded society was lost in the cesspool of its own corruption. The father was a despot, the mother a slave, and the child

a victim until it could become the murderer of its guilty parents. There you have a true picture of the pagan family.

The Son of God Who came down from heaven to accomplish the great work of redemption, began by recalling the family to its primitive institution. He proscribed polygamy and divorce, and made the conjugal bond a sacrament of the New Law. Numerous graces suited to the wants of the married persons were attached to it. The family was transformed, and through the family the world was renovated.

What a difference between the pagan and the Christian father! The former is like a despot with a drawn sword. Between him and his offspring there are no relations other than those of a wild beast with its young, of a tyrant with his slaves. Paternity, in so far as it is sublime, has really no existence for him. The latter, on the contrary, is familiar with its holy joys. The representative of that beloved Father Who is in heaven, the living image of the Creator, he shares not only in His divine paternity, but also in His exhaustless tenderness. The object of respect and love, how dear does that power become to the Christian father which he shares with his wife and children! His paternal authority is even more sacred and certainly more respected than if he wielded a club. On his brow Christianity has placed a ray of the majesty of the Most High, and a voice resounding through the family, is heard continually to say: "He who heareth you, heareth me."

And what shall we say of the Christian mother? To her especially is the sacrament of matrimony most profitable. Paganism only shows us in the wife a slave to be dishonored, beaten, cast aside, abandoned to shame and misery; or a beast of burden that is set apart, as is still done in the wilds of Africa, for the rudest labors.

How beautiful is the place which the sacrament of matrimony assigns to the mother of a family in Christian

society! A sacred being, an object of the liveliest affection, of the most tender regard, of veneration to all who surround her, the husband no longer appears in the rôle of despot and tyrant, but a protector and supporter. Over his heart she exercises the most powerful sway, that of gentleness and patience. Placed between the father and the child, she is a mediatrix of peace — an apostle of that charity which she communicates to everyone approaching her, of that Christian life for which she is so well made. Endowed with an angelic mission, she draws man to God by her virtues, and plants the first seeds of good in the heart of youth.

II

It is absolutely necessary that Jesus Christ be present at the nuptials of all Christians, just as He was present at the marriage of Cana. This should be your first thought, viz. to celebrate your marriage in the company of Christ, i.e. in Church, and after having purified your conscience by sacramental confession. Marriage is a sacrament of the living. Hence it would be a grave sacrilege to enter it with your soul steeped in mortal sin and destitute of God's grace. Celebrate then your nuptials in the company of Christ, if you wish Him to bless you, if you desire to find happiness both here and hereafter; otherwise you should justly fear that your union may turn out badly, filled with discord, sorrow and misery. That marriage entered with the fear of God proves a fountain of temporal blessings to the Christian is suggested by reason itself, and more forcibly demonstrated by the fact of to-day's gospel. The lowly couple of Cana celebrated their nuptials with Jesus, and He conferred upon them a signal benefit. He saved them unusual mortification, making provision for the scarcity of wine by a miracle. The first to notice their embarrassment was the Blessed Virgin, who is always alert to observe our distress, and who is full of goodness and compassion. Full of confi-

dence, therefore, she had recourse to her Divine Son, confining herself to these few simple, but expressive words: "They have no wine." There is the noble function fulfilled by Mary. God made her the mediator and advocate of men. Whoever wishes a favor need only have recourse to her, certain of obtaining his request. She presents our supplications to her Son. He might not hear us on account of our unworthiness, but He will listen to our petitions for the sake of her who presents them. How could He in fact refuse anything to her who ushered Him into the world, who nursed and clothed Him in infancy, who accompanied Him through all His sorrows, even to His dying breath on Calvary? No, He can deny His Blessed Mother nothing, and therefore is she deservedly described as all powerful by grace, as our Lord is omnipotent by nature. He can do whatever He chooses by His own power, while she can obtain whatever she desires through her intercession.

What confidence then we should have in this heavenly Patroness! How we should strive to honor, love, and please her that we may merit her protection. Devotion to Mary forms the sweetest pleasure of the Catholic heart, as well as the most powerful help, for it renders us assurance of our predestination. But our devotion must be solid, rational, and sincere, and not like that of many who make their affection to Mary consist in some practice of external piety, meanwhile neglecting those duties most pleasing to her. Now what are her desires? That we love her Divine Son, observe His law, that we abhor sin more than death itself. How many deluded Christians daily blaspheme His holy name, crucify Him anew by their sins, continually transgress His divine commands, yet boast of their devotion to His Blessed Mother, because they kiss her images, wear her scapular, or observe the vigils of her festivals. Oh what folly and deception!

Listen to what she said to the waiters at the marriage feast after she had made her request to her Divine Son:

"Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." There is the sermon which the Blessed Virgin continually delivers to all Christians. There is the advice she gives at this moment to each one of us. If you really wish my Divine Son to grant what you ask through my intercession, if you want Him to impart His graces and benefits, obey His precepts, do all that He has commanded either through Himself personally, or through the mouth of His Apostles. Accomplish what He ordains through the ministers of His Church whom He has appointed as your teachers in all things pertaining to eternal life. Let us have frequent recourse to Mary, but let us bear always in mind her salutary admonition.

The waiters followed accurately the orders of our Divine Redeemer. They filled with water the six stone jars which they found in the banquet hall. Our Lord changed this water into wine which the chief steward declared far superior to the first. Let us follow with docility His holy will. Thus we shall obtain from Him blessings both here and in the life to come.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

To-day's gospel records two miracles performed by our Divine Redeemer, one in the person of an unfortunate leper, the other in the servant of the centurion. The conduct of both leper and centurion furnishes us with an edifying example of faith, humility, and fraternal love. By a mere touch of His omnipotent hand, He instantly cures the man afflicted with leprosy, commanding him to reveal the prodigious fact to no one, but to go and show himself to the priest and offer the gift prescribed by the Mosaic law. In eulogizing the great faith of the centurion, our Lord takes occasion to predict the call of the gentiles into the Church, and the rejection of the Jews. The tender solicitude of the centurion for his sick servant teaches employers how to treat those who become disabled in their service. Instead of discharging the unfortunate servant and hiring another in his place, he has immediate recourse to our Divine Redeemer Who immediately grants him his request. Let us dwell for a few moments on the two miracles mentioned.

I

According to the Evangelist, great multitudes followed our Lord as He came down from the mountain. It was in fact necessary that He should come down from heaven into this valley of tears and misery, otherwise how would we ever be able to approach Him in order to be healed of our spiritual infirmities? Had not our heavenly Physician humbled Himself to the extent of assuming poor fallen human nature with all its miseries, there would be nothing left for us but eternal perdition. Man is indeed

able to cast himself into the bottom of the abyss, but is utterly incapable of extricating himself without divine assistance.

The first to approach our Lord as He came down from the mountain was a leper who said to Him: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He did not demand an absolute cure, as so many others did, but restricted himself to a simple profession of faith in our Savior's omnipotence. He implied that our Lord did not require any external aid or medical art, but by a mere act of His all-powerful will, He could accomplish the desired cure. Notwithstanding His omnipotence, our Lord does not always grant our supplications, for He sees that their object might prove detrimental to our soul. We may indeed have recourse to Him in the afflictions of the present life, but let our prayers be conditional like that of the leper. Let us employ as nearly as possible this mode of speech: Free me, Oh Lord, from my misfortune. Grant me this favor, provided it be pleasing to Thee, provided it be not prejudicial to my spiritual welfare. Thus did the saints pray. Thus did our Lord Himself pray in the Garden of Olives, beseeching His heavenly Father to let the bitter chalice of His passion pass from Him, to liberate Him from the tortures He was about to undergo, if that were possible. In fact to make us better understand His perfect conformity to the Divine Will, He immediately added: "Yet not my will, but Thine be done." Thus should every good Christian do in the midst of his many trials. He should have recourse to God with perfect confidence, at the same time conforming in all things to His holy will, placing ourselves entirely in His hands, letting Him do for us what is to our greatest advantage. Thus the poor leper did, and our Lord heard his prayer. Leprosy has always been regarded as symbolic of sin. For just as this loathsome disease makes its victims hideous and repulsive in the sight of men, so mortal sin disfigures the soul and renders it disgusting in the sight of

God. The leper came to Jesus and adored Him. Spiritual lepers that we are, let us also have recourse to Him. With fervent faith and contrition, let us exclaim: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." How many carry their spiritual leprosy about with them for years, unwilling to be cleansed in the tribunal of penance! "And Jesus stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean." In many of the cures He wrought, our Savior touched the sufferers to show the healing powers of His sacred humanity and to point out clearly the true physical cause of the effect. He may have touched the leper also to show that He was in no manner bound by the law, whatever its object. If it forbade contact with lepers as a sanitary precaution on account of the danger of infection, then the Master of life and death was indeed immune. If it forbade the contact for any symbolical reason because leprosy was a type of spiritual uncleanness, Jesus Christ, Who was infinite purity, certainly did not require that lesson.

By the expression —"I will," He gave evident proof of His divine power. The Apostles never used such language in performing their miraculous cures. They wrought them, not in their own name, but in the name of Jesus. St. Peter said to the lame man at the gate of the temple: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk." Since our Lord wrought miracles by His own power, and the faithful did so only in His name, it is an incontrovertible proof of His divinity.

"And Jesus said to him: See thou tell no man." If this prohibition was designed to be abiding, our Lord wished to give us an example of how we should avoid human applause and vainglory, and to teach us to shun the praise of men. This sort of vanity hurts us more than we realize, for it deprives us of every right to a future recompense and renders us contemptible in the sight of God. If with His divine assistance we accomplish a little good, let us not boast of it to our fellowmen.

We ought to keep it secret, unless charity or justice compels us to reveal it. Perhaps the leper was warned to keep his cure a secret from a motive of prudence. See thou tell no man *till* thou hast shown thyself to the priests who might maliciously deny the cure and refuse to declare him cleansed, were the miracle divulged before he had presented himself to them. According to the Mosaic law the cleansed lepers were obliged to show themselves to the priests officially appointed to examine them and to declare whether they were really cured. By the acceptance of the legal gift they would acknowledge the cure. Thus the acceptance of the gift would serve as a testimony against them before men, should they afterwards deny the leper to be cleansed. It would also be a testimony against them before God, should they refuse to believe in Christ who wrought the cure.

II

"And when He had entered into Capharnaum there came to Him a centurion beseeching Him and saying: Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy and is grievously tormented." He doesn't ask our Lord to heal his servant, but simply manifests his deplorable condition, fully persuaded that it was enough for our Lord to know the evil in order to offer prompt assistance without importuning Him with prayers and supplications. And he was not deceived, for Jesus showed Himself full of mercy and compassion for the unfortunate. We should therefore place in Him all our confidence and we shall never be disappointed. Let us show Him candidly our afflictions, whether of soul or body. True, He knows our needs better than we ourselves, but He desires that we make humble confession of them in order to acknowledge that of ourselves we can do nothing and that from Him alone comes every good gift. Thus the centurion did, and with his unbounded confidence in the goodness of Jesus, he merited the instant granting of his prayer. Our

divine Redeemer said to him in all kindness: "I will come and cure him." We scarcely know which is more entitled to admiration, the fervent faith of the centurion or his great humility. Many a modern Christian, had he been in the centurion's place, would have insisted upon our Lord's services as his inherent right. He would have suffered no delay. He held a responsible position in the Roman army; he commanded a hundred soldiers. St. Luke tells us that the centurion first requested the Jewish elders to present his petition to our Savior. "They besought Him earnestly, saying: He is worthy that thou shouldst do this for him. For he loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue." (Luke vii.) But the centurion does not take these apparent claims at all into consideration. Mindful of his own weakness and imperfections in the presence of Jesus Christ, and filled with embarrassment he declared himself altogether unworthy of receiving so great a guest into his home. "Lord," he exclaimed, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof." True humility teaches a man to find out the best of another and the worst of himself. Pride, on the contrary, shows a man nothing but matter for admiration in himself, and motives for scorn and ridicule in his fellowmen. While the centurion acknowledged himself unworthy of our Savior's visit, he proved himself worthy of all consideration. For God delights to dwell under the roof of an humble heart. Boldness of face and loudness of speech may prevail much among men, but they avail naught with God, unless to provoke His anger. It was proper that the foundation should be laid deep, when the building was high. The centurion's humility was not more lowly than his faith was lofty, for the latter reached up to heaven, and under the form of human weakness it could discern omnipotence in Christ. He declared the corporal presence of our Lord unnecessary at the bedside of the sick man, and that one word alone from Him would amply suffice to restore to perfect health.

"Only say the word and my servant shall be healed." His faith seems all the more amazing when we consider that he was an unfortunate pagan buried in the darkness of idolatry and superstition. Our Lord Himself wondered and did not hesitate to manifest His amazement by uttering those memorable words to the honor of the centurion and to the confusion of certain Christians: "Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel." Being God, our Savior always knew the faith of the centurion, and by grace wrought it in him. Yet He wondered at it. Why? In order to teach us to admire what He holds especially worthy of esteem and admiration.

We never find Him wondering at great wealth, at expensive jewelry, splendid garments, at the costly works of human industry. When His disciples wondered at the magnificence of the temple, He seemed rather to rebuke them. We never discover Him wondering at the glorious frame of heaven and earth, but when He perceives grace or faith in the soul, not only does He approve of them, but is even filled with wonder. Riches, talents, beauty, education and social prestige may make us accepted by men, but it is holiness, a strong faith, and ardent hope and a burning charity alone that can make us acceptable before God.

The leper and centurion made open profession of their belief in the infinite power and goodness of our Divine Redeemer. Like them we must not only preserve with care the faith in our hearts, but also profess it publicly when occasion requires. "With the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. x, 4.)

Let us take both the leper and the centurion as our model by exciting in our hearts those noble sentiments of lively faith, of profound humility, especially when approaching the Eucharistic table in order to receive worthily into our souls the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus

that same Redeemer who cleansed the leper and healed the servant of the centurion, will also cleanse us of our iniquities and heal our spiritual infirmities. He will grant us all the graces we need, not only in order to live contented in this life, but also to obtain eternal happiness in the next.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

We stand in continual need of light and strength which we can derive from good reading, and especially from the careful perusal of that most sacred book recording the doctrine and example of our Divine Master. Meditating on its inspired pages, the mind becomes more and more enlightened by the acquisition of truth, the heart becomes enriched and adorned by the possession of virtue. To-day's gospel describes the boat of the Apostles tossed to and fro by the angry waves on Lake Genesareth and in imminent peril of sinking. Helpless in the face of danger and trembling with fear, they have recourse to Jesus for assistance. Awakened from His mysterious slumber, with a few words He instantly restores calm to the troubled elements. The storm foreseen by our Lord with all the fitting circumstances for the manifestation of His divine power may have been the result of natural causes. Inland lakes, like the sea of Galilee, surrounded by lofty mountains, are subject to sudden and violent hurricanes which frequently endanger the lives of travellers. This storm was a figure of the tempests that were to assail the disciples and for which our Lord would thus prepare them. The gospel narrative is a most significant allegory from which we can derive both light and consolation; light, because it shows us what our earthly pilgrimage is in reality; consolation, for it directs us to our Savior as our sole refuge in time of danger.

I

When we picture to ourselves a fragile bark with seams open and loosely joined, floating upon a vast expanse of

water, under whose treacherous surface lie concealed innumerable rocks, and this bark buffeted by turbulent waves which every moment threaten to engulf it, we have an exact portrayal of human life here upon earth. Our soul in fact may be regarded as a boat sailing across the tempestuous ocean of the present life to the haven of eternity. We are all fragile barks, for the original fall of our first parents has disorganized us, depriving us of that robust constitution with which man was originally endowed by the Creator. Say what you may of worldly joys and pleasures, if we consider the stern reality, we are forced to acknowledge that the world, instead of being a garden of pleasure and delights, is on the contrary a tumultuous sea, a valley of tears, a land of exile, a place of indescribable misery and sorrow. This fragile bark of our soul is first of all tossed about by the angry waves of human passions. Who does not feel occasionally the baneful and malevolent gust of pride, envy, and concupiscence? The soul is likewise violently agitated by the menacing billows of human adversity, by so many hardships and misfortunes. Not to mention the afflictions which men bring upon themselves by their own misconduct, we may have to suffer from continued pain and illness which render life a burden and deprive us of the means of subsistence. We may lose those most dear to us and upon whom we depended for all our earthly happiness. Parents may be deprived of their children, and children may become orphans. The wealthy may be reduced to poverty, and the poor to beggary. The best of men and the very favorites of God cannot pass through the present life without an occasional affliction.

This frail vessel of ours is constantly colliding with the rocks of human contradictions. Besides the internal strife aroused by the passions, we must endure that outward contention occasioned by the malice and perversity of men. And this tempest never ceases; it lasts not merely for a day or a year, but during our entire life; it never allows

us a moment's respite, but is incessant. No one can boast of enjoying absolute peace, because we all have some annoyance that bothers us. We all have temptations that assail our virtue and strive to drag us into sin. If the storm assailing us is never quelled, it will therefore be our interest and duty always to resist, if we have at heart our salvation. Woe to us if we be not continually upon our guard. One moment of indolence or neglect may perhaps decide our eternal destiny. Hence our advantage and our duty compel us to struggle against the tempests of life. But have we the necessary strength to overcome them? No, we must unfortunately admit that we are absolutely helpless, just as the Apostles were incapable of quelling with their arms the violent storm that menaced them.

Should we then despair, and permit ourselves to be swept away by the tempest? On the contrary, we should imitate the Apostles who in the moment of danger had recourse to Jesus, imploring His assistance. He instantly helped and rescued them. In the hour, then, of temptation, hardship, and adversity, we should confidently have recourse to Him, and He will impart to us the necessary strength to overcome the gravest dangers. He is always with us. He seems at times to be far away, to be unaware of our distress, and to slumber. But He is on the contrary mercifully watching at our side, and ever disposed to render us assistance. It matters not, then, that we are weak and helpless. "If God be with us," says the prophet, "who can stand against us?" However violent the onslaughts of the enemy, we should not fear, because we can do all things in Him who strengthens us. When therefore, temptation assails us, let us cry out to Jesus, with the Apostles: "Lord, save us, or we perish." When the waves of wicked passions seem to overwhelm us, let us exclaim to our Divine Redeemer: "Oh Lord, deliver us!" When cast down by the winds of malice and adversity, let us immediately have recourse to Him. Do you think for a moment that He will refuse to come

to the aid of those imploring Him? Do you believe that temptation would be strong enough to overcome us, if we always sought help and refuge in this manner? Many seek to excuse themselves, claiming that they were obliged to yield, because the temptation was too strong, and that they lacked the strength to conquer it. But such excuse is vain. The true reason of your downfall is because in the moment of trial, you did not have recourse to Him, but trifled with the danger. That is why so many young people fall into sin as often as they are tempted. That is really why, in spite of confessions, communions, and purposes of amendment, you are unable to resist the slightest occasion of sin. You do not think at all of Him Who is both able and willing to save you. You do not have recourse to Him Who by His omnipotent word could instantly restore peace to your soul, and calm the tempest of your disordered affections. Howsoever violent the storm may be, it never attains such magnitude that you cannot overcome it with God's assistance. He will never permit us to be tempted beyond our strength, and, provided of course that we ask, He always gives us sufficient grace to overcome temptation. That is a dogma of our holy religion.

We see then the lesson afforded us by to-day's gospel. It teaches us that we live continually in the midst of a raging tempest. Whether we will it or not, that is our real condition. Two destinies await our selection. Either to abandon ourselves to the tumultuous waves that will carry us down to the infernal abyss; or to struggle valiantly, fortified by divine grace against the angry elements until we finally reach the haven of eternal happiness.

To combat and pray, there is our destiny, there is the only road leading to eternal life; to struggle and pray during our entire earthly sojourn which for that reason is called in Scripture a continual warfare. True indeed, few possess this fortitude, while the majority prefer to abandon themselves to the mercy of wind and

waves. But who of you wishes to imitate them? Who wants eventually to share in the destiny awaiting them?

Let us rather follow the example given us by the Saints who, having heroically fought and conquered the violent passions of life, now rejoice in the haven of eternal bliss. No fatigue, no sacrifice can be compared to that ineffable joy, and we shall congratulate ourselves for having followed the prudent counsels of our faith.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Addressing the multitude one day our Lord said that a man sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy came during the night and oversowed it with cockle. When the blade sprang up, the servants noticing the noxious weed that encumbered the field, asked their master if they should not gather it up. But he told them to wait until the harvest time. Then, he added, I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it in bundles to be burned; but the wheat gather ye into my barn. Our Lord Himself gave an explanation of the parable. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man." Why does He almost invariably call Himself the Son of Man? True, He has a body and a soul, a human will and heart with all its human affections. Yet He is not a human, but a Divine Person. He is not a man made God, but a God made man, having two natures and two wills with one personality. Would it not then have been more appropriate and more in conformity with His dignity to style Himself the Son of God? Certainly, but He humbly called Himself the Son of Man to testify His great love for mankind, to teach us that under the disguise of His assumed human nature He came to sow the seed of His heavenly doctrine in the hearts of men. By the cockle He wished to allude to that disastrous propaganda of error and vice which tends to paralyse and destroy the beneficent effects of those salutary maxims. He came to teach men in order to save them, and also to allude to the regulations of His providence which tolerates the wicked during the present life in order to punish them in eternity. Let us meditate briefly upon these

wholesome truths and learn at the school of Christ how we must conduct ourselves in order not to suffer from the enemies of our salvation.

I

Christian society, said our Lord, may be compared to a field in which the householder sowed good seed. The resemblance could not be more spontaneous or more expressive. Doctrine is properly a seed which when planted in the hearts of the people will in time bring forth fruit, viz., human acts. If the seed or doctrine be good, the acts issuing from it will also be good. For man acts according to the knowledge and education which he has received. Now what are the doctrines which Christ has sown in the field of this world? What are the doctrines which the Catholic Church continues in His name to sow among the nations of the world? They are all most holy and perfect in every respect because derived from God Himself. They enlighten the mind and sanctify the heart. The truths of Catholic faith and morality contained in the gospel, and forming the subject matter of Catholic teaching in its complete and adequate sense, have commanded the respect of all wise men, even of those who assail them through passion and revile them by their perverse lives.

Hence, in all localities where the precious seed of Christian doctrine has been planted, we naturally expect to find fruits of sanctity and perfection. In these places all men without exception ought to lead honest, saintly, and exemplary lives. But as a matter of fact do we find this to be the case? No! We discover, unfortunately, a disgusting mixture of good and evil, of vices and virtues, of good and wicked. We must acknowledge that there exists a great preponderance of evil in Christian society. And whence this disorder? Our Lord reminds us that "an enemy hath done this." It was an enemy who spoiled and ruined the beautiful works of God. This

enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and then went away. Do you know who this enemy is that continues to scatter bad seed in the midst of Christian nations? It is the demon who, out of hatred to God, his just punisher, would like to destroy all the works of God. It is the demon who, envious of man's good, would like to deprive him of it, and make him a companion in misery. Hence, employing the malign influence God allows him to exercise over creatures for our probation, he seeks to neutralize the divine benefits. To the seed of revealed truths he opposes the cockle of his deceits and errors. Just as our Lord has His ministers, the priests who continually sow the seed of His heavenly doctrine in the world, so the demon has emissaries who assist him in his diabolical enterprise; they are the wicked of all classes. These ministers of Satan live in our midst. They are all those persons either notoriously vicious or hypocritically pious who suggest to us erroneous maxims and teachings contrary to the truths of our holy religion. They are those who teach you differently from what is taught by the priest whom God has given you as spiritual guide and director. They are those who give you wicked suggestions, enticing you to sin, seeking to prejudice you against good works, exercises of piety and devotion, and especially against frequenting the sacraments. This accursed cockle, which the demon and his iniquitous satellites scatter over the earth, gradually develops and produces its fruits, viz., the multitude of sinners of all kinds encumbering the earth and living in the midst of the just.

Even upon the wicked God causes the sun to shed its beneficent rays, also for them He allows the rain to fall, and the earth to bring forth its fruits. But they have no reason to boast of these heavenly gifts, if they only reflect that these blessings are not intended for their benefit, but are the inheritance belonging to the friends of God, for whose sake they are allowed to enjoy for a

while divine toleration. Much less can they boast when they consider that the enjoyment of these earthly blessings is restricted to the brief period of the present life; when they realize the awful destiny awaiting them in eternity. This sorrowful fate we behold symbolized and predicted in to-day's gospel. The master of the field commanded the servants to wait until the harvest, adding that he would then give orders to have the cockle gathered up to be burned, and the wheat to be placed in his barn. The meaning of this figurative language is that our Lord will allow the wicked to live until their impiety has reached a certain limit, until the measure of their iniquities is filled up. Then death will snatch them from the field of life, and God, the just rewarder of the good and punisher of the wicked, will cast them out to burn in the eternal flames of hell. "Bind it in bundles to burn." Certainly a fate most awful to contemplate, but nevertheless just. Cockle is good for nothing else than to furnish food for flames. It is fashionable nowadays to ignore hell altogether, and non-Catholic modern writers unanimously favor this delusion, so acceptable to those who like not punishment either in this life or in the other. God, they say, Who is infinitely good cannot punish the sinner eternally. But from His infinite goodness follows just the contrary. For, must not his hatred of evil correspond to His love of good? Must He not therefore punish evil eternally in the same measure as He rewards good? How then can the goodness of God be appealed to against the eternity of punishment? Neither is eternal punishment irreconcilable with divine justice on the ground that it is out of all proportion to the offense committed perhaps in an instant. But it is in the strictest proportion to the sin, not in regard to its duration, but with reference to its malice, which is an infinite evil. Murder may be perpetrated in a moment, yet human justice inflicts life imprisonment or capital punishment upon the culprit.

To us Catholics the certainty of eternal punishment is

just as real as the existence of God Himself. In conclusion let us make two important observations. If the disseminators of cockle are continually moving about in our midst, we should be ever on our guard lest this pernicious seed be sown by them in our hearts, and we find ourselves ruined and lost by these malignant seducers. If in the field of Christ, i. e., in His Church, the wheat and accursed cockle grow together, would it not be prudent for me to ascertain to which class I belong, and therefore frequently to ask myself the question: Am I wheat or cockle? Am I deserving to be cast one day into the midst of the flames, or admitted into heaven?

Let us then seriously endeavor to find out exactly our condition, whether it be good or bad. If we unfortunately discover ourselves to be cockle, let us with God's help correct our vicious nature, and strive to become wheat, so that on the day of the harvest we may be admitted into the abode of the heavenly Garnerer.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Our Divine Lord shows the wonderful effects of His heavenly doctrine by comparing it to a grain of mustard seed and to leaven. The tiny grain of mustard seed becomes a flourishing tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in its branches. There is a true picture faithfully representing the growth of the Church established by Christ. In the beginning it appeared insignificant, but have patience. Let it gain a foothold among the nations of the earth, and you will be astounded at its rapid and wonderful development.

Have you ever noticed the peculiar property of leaven? When a woman wishes to make bread, she takes a small quantity of leaven or yeast and mixes it with three measures of flour; the leaven has the quality of fermenting and raising the whole mass of bread. Our Lord declares that His doctrine will produce a similar effect. Introduced by preaching into the heart of man, it will transform him into a new creature. The prediction of Christ has been accurately fulfilled and continues to be fulfilled, as we may see with our own eyes. The tree of the gospel already spreads its branches over the whole earth, and brings all people under its beneficent shade. The gospel of Christ preached in the world has produced, and still produces, the most wonderful effects in the heart of man. It will always be a delightful as well as a salutary occupation for the true Christian to dwell with gratitude upon these great prodigies of Divine Goodness.

I

The parable of the mustard seed employed by our Lord could not be better adapted in order to show what

the Christian religion was in its infancy. This holy religion, to which we have the happiness to belong, enjoys at the present day the very same boundaries as the world itself. It is known and professed by people of every language and country. That in fact is the reason why the Church is called Catholic in time, place, and doctrine. As the catechism says, " she subsists in all ages, teaches all nations and maintains all truth." Do not imagine, however, that our holy religion was always so universally diffused as at the present time. No, its development was much the same as that of a plant whose growth is gradual and continual. The Church, at present so great, was indeed very small at the time of its birth, in fact so insignificant that, humanly speaking, no one could foretell its marvellous development or explain it otherwise than by acknowledging that here indeed was the finger of God and the work of His omnipotence. Whether we consider the Christian religion on the part of its Author or of the persons to whom its dissemination was entrusted, there certainly can be nothing smaller in the world's estimation. What was the Church in the stable of Bethlehem and who were the members composing it? Three poor creatures living in obscurity, in want, in the absolute privation of every earthly comfort. A Virgin mother, a helpless babe, and a poor artisan who is the guardian and support of both. Look at the Church on the summit of Calvary. What is it there? Humanly speaking, its condition is still more deplorable. We behold its Founder suspended as a malefactor from an infamous gibbet, and a few women weeping over His lacerated remains. Let us observe the Church finally in the cenacle of Jerusalem. What is it there? Twelve poor fishermen, ignorant, illiterate, despised and persecuted like their Master. Fearing the persecution of the Jews, they keep under cover and dare not show themselves in public. Behold the origin of Christianity! Don't you think then most appropriate the comparison suggested by our Di-

vine Redeemer? But the tiny grain soon began to develop and spread out. It developed when the Spirit of God descended upon this poor church in order to inflame it with the fire of His divine love. No sooner had those timid Apostles received the Spirit of God than they emerged from their hiding-place. Then they appeared intrepid before the world, just as the seed under the influence of the sun's vivifying warmth sprouts from the ground into the light of day. When the Apostles issued from the cenacle, they did not hesitate in their glorious career, nor did they recognize other limits than those of the earth. In an incredibly short while they announced the word of God to all people, and invited all nations to the following of Christ. Scarcely did the tree of the Church spring up than it was exposed to the winds of persecution threatening to shatter it. It was subjected to the inclemencies of the season that were not always favorable. But instead of suffering injury, it only acquired additional strength, power, and grandeur. This mystic tree of the Church, believed at the present time by some to be withered and wasted away on account of its age, still flourishes; full of life and vigor it continues to grow and develop. If a single branch withers and decays, a dozen more beautiful spring up in its place. Do not even Protestant writers, like Macaulay, admit this as an historical fact? If the faith languishes in one country, does it not seem to flourish in another? If the Church happens to lose one nation, does it not immediately gain another in its stead? At the time of the so-called reformation, Germany, England, and Scotland were lost to the Church. But was she not compensated for that loss by her acquisitions in China, Japan, and in the new hemisphere? This Church so bitterly attacked at the present day and oppressed by some of the nations of Europe is consoled by the wonderful progress she is making right here in the United States and Canada.

II

As the parable of the grain of mustard seed indicates the external, visible effects of the gospel, so the parable of the leaven denotes its internal results, its fermentation and the active love of God which it produces in the heart of man. What in fact are the means employed by the Church for her development and propagation? The word of God, that word which Christ in to-day's gospel compares to leaven. What does leaven do? When mixed with a quantity of flour, it ferments every particle of it, causing the entire mass to rise. Thus the word of God, which through preaching penetrates the heart of man no matter how carnal and obstinate he may be, will move, raise, spiritualize and completely transform him. Have you never noticed the difference between leavened and unleavened bread? Still greater is the difference between the individual instructed and guided by the gospel and him who has no other guide but the finite rule of his reason. A single example may suffice to convince you of it. Saul is a great persecutor of the Church of Christ. He guards the clothes of those who stone the protomartyr, St. Stephen. He gloats over the shedding of that innocent blood. He flits from city to city like a famished vulture in order to drag the primitive Christians to prison and to torture. At the gate of Damascus, he hears the words of God: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And Saul is by magic transformed into another creature. He thinks no longer of persecuting the Church, but is all zeal in spreading it throughout the world. He becomes a vessel of election, the Apostle of the Gentiles. Augustine enveloped in the errors of Manicheism causes his saintly mother Monica to shed many bitter tears, and the Church as well. He clouded his brilliant intellect with the darkness of heresy, and soiled his noble heart in the filth of iniquity. But scarcely did he hear the word of God preached to him by the eloquence of St. Ambrose than

Augustine changes his conduct. He becomes an illustrious saint, one of the brightest luminaries and geniuses of humanity. The same may be said of countless others who have been transformed into new creatures by the leaven of the gospel. The same may be asserted of so many agnostics and infidels who are every day changed by the preaching of the gospel into fervent believers. How many sinners have been rescued by this preaching of the word of God from the lowest depths of depravity and converted into pious and virtuous Christians! This is an ordinary and frequent occurrence. Strange that the divine word does not exercise its marvelous power over all Christians. Strange that so many hear the word of God without amending their lives! Of course that depends exclusively upon the dispositions of those who hear it badly, and who prefer to follow the voice of the flesh and their passions rather than the voice of God.

Let us, however, hope that you will not allow yourself to be dominated by spiritual sloth to such an extent as to grow tired of the divine word, but that you will always hear it with respect and love from those commanded to preach it to you. Thus you will feel yourselves gradually changed by it into virtuous and exemplary Christians.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Church proposes for our instruction this morning the parable of the householder who hired laborers to work in his vineyard, and gave them at the close of the day's work the wage for which he had stipulated. Our Lord employs this parable as an incentive to good works so that at the end of life we may receive from Him the recompense of our labors. Let us consider attentively this interesting parable and we shall see that God is that good householder inviting all men to labor in His vineyard. We shall learn what kind of works He expects of us, and finally what reward He shall one day give us, if as worthy laborers we shall have fulfilled our duty and accomplished His holy will.

I

The householder who goes in quest of laborers for his vineyard is Almighty God, and the vineyard is His Church, which He Himself established. The laborers are all men who by grace and faith are invited to enter the Church. All of you have been called, engaged by your Creator for this great and important work. No sooner were you born than He summoned you at your Baptism, thereby making you His adopted children, adorning your souls with sanctifying grace, thus receiving you into the vineyard of His Church and consecrating you to His service. He provided pastors to instruct you in the great truths of salvation just as soon as you attained the use of reason. Whenever you neglected His service, He never failed to remind you of your engagements both by the inward inspirations of His grace, by the voice of conscience, and by the ministry of His Church.

In the vineyard of God's Church the bishops and priests are the chief ministers. Their duty is not only to work out their own salvation, but also to labor in a special manner for the salvation of those under their spiritual care by giving them proper guidance and direction. Even the humblest and obscurest member of the Church is a laborer in the Lord's vineyard. Each one must cultivate at least his own soul, which is a plant in that vineyard. Each one according to his state and condition in life must help to cultivate the spiritual garden of his neighbor, by performing the greatest spiritual good to his fellowmen. The person endowed with the goods of this world must labor by his generous support of Christian works of benevolence and charity. The individual gifted with learning and education should labor by spreading the knowledge of truth, by endeavoring to remove prejudices, the weeds of error and vice that sometimes stealthily crop out in the Lord's vineyard. Employers should labor by exacting as much as possible from those engaged in their service the exact observance of God's law. How many at the present day manifest the slightest interest in the spiritual welfare of their workmen? Parents must labor by educating their children in the fear, knowledge, and love of God, watching with paternal solicitude over their company, their conduct, their reading, and recreation. All, in a word, great and small, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, should labor by shunning evil, doing good, edifying our fellowmen by our virtuous example.

According to the gospel the householder went out to hire laborers at different hours of the day. The ancient Jews computed the hours of the day, not from twelve o'clock at midnight, as we do, but in the morning with the rising sun. Their first hour of day, according to our computation of time, was six o'clock in the morning, their third hour was our nine o'clock, their sixth hour corresponded to our twelve o'clock at noon, their ninth hour to our three o'clock in the afternoon, and their eleventh

hour was about five o'clock in the evening. These different periods of day, viz. the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hour, denote the various stages of life which in holy scripture is frequently called a day, in order to signify how quickly it passes. Like the day, our life upon earth has its morning, midday, afternoon and evening, i.e. its childhood, youth, manhood and old age. At all stages of life Almighty God invites men to His service. Some He has called from tenderest childhood, and they are those fortunate souls who began to love and serve Him from the first dawnings of reason. They have never tarnished their baptismal innocence. They have walked constantly in the way of His commandments. Others He calls at midday, and they are the ones who have spent their youth far from God, engulfed perhaps in sensual amusement and dissipation, the slaves of their passions and sinful inclinations. Finally God sometimes calls men to His service in the evening of life when the night of the sepulchre is fast approaching. Divine Mercy occasionally touches the heart of some hardened sinner who has squandered his life in iniquity. He moves him to repentance and saves him, as in the case of the repentant thief. All stages of life are good in order to save one's soul. No matter how enormous our offences, we should never despair, nor imagine ourselves abandoned by God, but always have confidence in His infinite mercy. Let us, however, not rashly presume on His goodness, nor turn a deaf ear to His invitations, vainly imagining that He is so infinitely good He will receive us whenever it may please us to return to Him. When God calls us, we must harken to His voice and accept His invitation promptly, as did the laborers of the parable. He may not repeat His invitation a second time. This indeed is the rock on which so many make shipwreck. God calls them, urges them to abandon sin, to give up a vicious habit, to remove some certain scandalous occasion of sin and return to Him. But instead of following with docility this voice of mercy

and of love which wishes to save them, they cling tenaciously to their vicious life. Unhappy people! God may never call them again. Perhaps in their regard shall be verified those awful words of Scripture: "You shall seek me, but you shall not find me, and you shall die in your sin."

Many of us have perhaps remained too long idle, have spent our lives up to the present without working in the Lord's vineyard, without accomplishing a small amount of good. For many of us evening is rapidly approaching. Shall we not then resolve to lay aside our sloth and accomplish the work which Almighty God expects of us?

II

When evening came the householder summoned all the laborers, and commencing with the last, he gave to each one the same amount of wages. Those, however, who had been hired early in the day were greatly disappointed. They expected much more as they had worked longer, and they murmured. But their grumbling was unreasonable. They had agreed to work for so much, and the householder gave them what they had agreed to work for. He fulfilled his part of the contract, and whatever else he did with his money was none of their business. The lesson our Savior wished to teach in to-day's gospel is this: Man's reward hereafter does not depend on the time of his calling, but on his zeal and fervor after the call. The last called may be first in merit on account of his greater zeal during his shorter period of service. We know from our own experience that one person may do more work and more efficiently in a few hours than another might accomplish in a whole day. God is infinitely just, and He will reward each man according to his works. Those who have served Him from early childhood, and those who have been converted to Him at the eleventh hour, will be equally admitted into heaven. But there will be different degrees of glory and happiness, just as there are

various degrees of sanctity and perfection. All will enjoy perfect peace and content, and every longing of the human heart will be gratified.

This thought of eternal happiness should incite us to a constant fulfilment of duty; it ought to be a source of comfort to us in the midst of the trials and hardships of life. Certainly the practical Christian life demands continual sacrifice. But we cannot avoid it, if we expect a recompense, and the recompense is worthy of the effort. He who works not for God, works for the world, the flesh and the devil, whose service brings indeed poor compensation.

Let us then labor voluntarily and cheerfully for God, with the firm hope of receiving that glory which, in the language of the Apostle, cannot be compared to the fatigues and hardships of the present life. Let us work zealously and energetically in order to obtain that immortal crown of glory for which we were created and which awaits us in eternity.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

To-day's gospel records another of our Savior's parables which He Himself explains to His Apostles for the purpose of arousing in them both the interest and the desire to hear His word so that they may derive from it salutary fruit. It is the parable of the sower who noticed a good part of the seed going to waste. Some of it fell on the roadside and naturally was trampled under foot by pedestrians, or devoured by the birds of the air. Some fell upon the rock and scarcely did it spring up than it withered away for want of moisture. Some fell among thorns and was choked. Finally some fell upon good ground and produced fruit a hundredfold. If we desire the moral application of this parable we have only to listen to the words of our Divine Redeemer Who Himself gives us the explanation.

I

The seed, says our Lord, is the word of God, just as the field receiving it is the heart of man. The resemblance is very striking. When seed is planted in the earth it grows and produces fruit. In like manner when in our soul are planted the holy maxims of Jesus Christ, they also produce their fruit which are pious resolutions, good works, acts of virtue. Just as the soil cannot bring forth fruit unless it be sown, so man can accomplish nothing in the order of salvation unless he receives into his heart the seed of the word of God. It is not necessary to have been raised upon a farm in order to know what a neglected field or garden will produce. Will it bring forth fruit or flowers? Neither, but it will produce an abundant crop of thorns and thistles, useless weeds. The same may be said of the

human heart. If the heart of man does not receive the good seed of God's word, it will produce nothing but vices and imperfections, because his nature is corrupt and inclined to sin. That is the reason why the world is filled with error and iniquity, why virtue is becoming more rare, and vice more common. The reason of it all is because the word of God is despised. Men no longer wish to hear it, they no longer desire to have planted in the field of their heart this salutary seed which would produce fruits of eternal life. Hence trickery, dishonesty, intemperance, impurity, and the most revolting crimes are becoming of daily occurrence. Society is rapidly losing its sense of morality, and arriving at that stage when virtue is regarded as a sort of weakness, and vice as a virtue. You will experience little difficulty in recognizing those who eagerly and voluntarily hear the word of God, even if they have their defects, for they are less addicted to vice, less enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and error. On the other hand all that miserable class utterly devoid of every religious principle and natural honesty, recoil in disgust and horror from hearing the word of God.

True, this seed of the gospel frequently falls on sterile ground even in the soul of him who receives it. True, many hear the word of God without deriving any advantage. Why? Our Lord tells us the reason. "Some of this seed," He said, "fell on the public highway, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air devoured it." And who are these? They are those Christians, continues our Lord, who hear the word of God materially, only with the ears of the body; then the devil cometh and taketh the word from their heart, lest believing they should be saved. They are those who, entirely submerged in worldly interests, in the pleasures of life, pursue and appreciate only sensual things. They haven't the faintest idea of what concerns the spiritual. They are those who, by the just judgment of God, have their heart hardened like a well beaten path; those who have ears, but hear not.

Finally they are all men who, absorbed in material things, live as if they had no souls to save and take about as much interest in a hereafter as the domestic animals about them. Even if they happen occasionally to hear a sermon by accident, at a funeral for example, it is precisely as if they didn't hear it, because their mind comprehends nothing of what regards the soul.

II

Some of the gospel seed, says our Lord, fell upon the rock, and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away for want of moisture. In this hard, rocky soil are prefigured many Christians of whom the world is full and who would like to reconcile two things absolutely contrary to each other, namely, virtue and vice, God and sin, the pleasures of life and the practices of religion. These weak, inconstant Christians have indeed a little faith, possess a slight inclination to good. Hence it is not to be wondered at, that hearing the word of God, they form some sort of a good resolution to put an end to their sinful career, to change their conduct and devote themselves to the service of God. But their resolutions have little efficacy, and deprived of moisture they soon wither up. The pleasures, seductions, and temptations of the world come upon them, and immediately good resolutions are forgotten and the soul's interests are sacrificed for worldly enjoyment. These apparent, deceitful conversions are neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to the Christian. It is necessary to break by penance and mortification the hardness of our heart, in order that the word of God may fructify and not grow simply on the surface, preserving beneath all the hardness of vice and passion.

A third part of the seed fell among thorns, and these, according to our Lord's explanation, are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares, riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit. Many Christians, although not immersed in vice, are notwith-

standing totally absorbed by the interests of life. They are more eager for money than for virtue, more anxious to ascend the social scale than to climb the ladder of Christian perfection. Hence they willingly hear the word of God and form good resolutions. But the accursed material interests dominate them and do not allow their good resolutions to materialize, thus compelling them to spend their whole time in commercial pursuits. Never satisfied with their actual income, they are ever seeking to acquire more. The slightest gain fills them with joy, while the most trivial loss may plunge them into deepest grief. In the midst of these commercial solicitudes, the austere truths of religion lose importance in their sight and dwindle into nothing when compared to some pecuniary advantage. These deluded people sacrifice their true interest for a fallacious one. They seem content with living among thorns, with being continually tormented by thorns which the goods of this world are, according to the assertion of our Lord Himself. If they listened with docility to God's word, they would enjoy the treasures of grace and peace of heart.

Finally part of the seed fell upon good ground, and that, says our Lord, are they who in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word of God, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience. If the first are really to be deplored for rendering their salvation impossible, these last deserve unstinted admiration, and with our Lord we shall call them blessed. What a pity that so small a number of Christians derive profit from the preaching of the gospel! We learn in fact from to-day's parable that only one of the four classes of men hear the word of God with fruit. All the others hear it in vain, without considering the vast majority who neglect it entirely or openly refuse to hear it.

This simple reflection should incite you always to hear the word of God with the greatest eagerness, because beyond a doubt the Christian who never hears it cannot save

his soul. Nor can he be saved who, having heard it, fails to put it into practice. Only those shall be saved who having heard the word of God in a good and perfect heart bring forth fruit in patience.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

In this world we encounter two kinds of blind people; some are blind of soul while others are blind of body. The spiritually blind do not see or do not wish to see the truth. The corporally blind are unable to perceive the material objects surrounding them. Jesus Christ, the true light that enlighteneth every man, came into the world to cure this twofold blindness. He cured the blindness of soul, namely, religious ignorance, by the light of His heavenly doctrine. He healed the blindness of body by His infinite power. It might seem an easier task to spread the light of religious truth in a darkened intellect than to restore the sense of sight Such, however, is not the case, as is evident from to-day's gospel. With the greatest facility our Lord restores sight to the blind man of Jericho, but He seems to have great difficulty in making His Apostles understand. He does not succeed in enlightening their blind intellect with the light of truth, although He employs the simplest and plainest language. Let us briefly consider these two facts narrated in the gospel, and draw from them a few practical lessons.

I

Our Lord wished to acquaint His Apostles of His approaching passion. So one day He took them apart and said to them: "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man. For He shall be delivered to the gentiles, and shall be mocked and scourged and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death, and the third day He shall rise

again." No language could be clearer or plainer than this. In these few words our Savior gave an exact description of His death with all the sorrowful circumstances that were to accompany it, and at the same time He foretold His glorious resurrection. But did the Apostles comprehend their divine Master? Not in the least, for the Evangelist adds that "this word was hid from them and they did not understand the things that were said." It seems strange that they did not comprehend a conversation so clear and simple. Yet such was the case. Their minds were not yet enlightened by the light of faith. Hence they were unable to grasp the most elementary truths of revelation. They had formed of Christ an altogether human idea conformable to the uncertain light of their private judgment. They had fixed the notion in their heads that Christ should conquer the world by physical force. Hence all talk of suffering, humiliation and death was a mystery to them; they could not understand it. When man lacks the light of faith to guide and direct him, he is like a poor blind man. He sees nothing, he understands nothing. Or, if he does see and understand, it is only what comes in contact with his senses, what he can conjure in his imagination, or only what concerns his material interest. He is otherwise incapable of understanding the wise and salutary teachings of religion. Hence he makes the latter the object of his scorn, derision, or attack. Thus the Jews and Gentiles repudiated the Gospel teachings as scandal and folly. The primitive believers, on the contrary, voluntarily shed their blood rather than deny the Gospel. The Augustines, the Thomases of Aquin, and the greatest geniuses of by-gone ages as well as of our own times, reverently bow down before the Cross, while the agnostics and libertines imagine that they are performing an act of heroism when they utter insults and blasphemies against it. Yet it is the same doctrine equally announced to all. Why such a disparity of judgment? It is simply because some have the light of faith and understand the truths

which it teaches; understanding, they love and respect them and hold them dearer than anything else on earth. Others, on the contrary, are deprived of this divine light. Hence they cannot comprehend religious truth; not comprehending it, they make it the butt of their ridicule and sacrilegious onslaughts.

The light of faith rendering man capable of knowing and firmly believing revealed truths, is a free gift of God, a supernatural virtue which He infuses into our souls at the time of Baptism. Every Christian by the very fact that he is baptized possesses this inestimable gift of faith. But unfortunately many deprive themselves of it through their own fault. This happens especially through worldly, carnal dissipation, through vicious habits which corrupting the heart also blind the intellect. Many not perceiving the beauty, the sanctity, the truth of religion, attack and despise it as a myth, a superstition. They do not foresee the consequences of a dissipated life; they fail to appreciate the good of which they are depriving themselves, nor do they fully realize the evil they incur by irreligion. Should any friend solicitous of their spiritual welfare endeavor to enlighten these unforunate blind men, they remain cold and indifferent before the most convincing arguments. You might as well talk to a stone wall. They are like children playing upon the border of a precipice. In order to enlighten them it would require a miracle of divine grace, a prodigy still greater than that of restoring sight to a person born blind. Natural blindness is a defect of nature which the power of God can remedy when He chooses. But spiritual blindness is a moral defect, a vice of the will which can freely choose between light and darkness, and which can place obstacles to the reception of God's grace.

What effort does it cost Almighty God to restore sight to the blind? Did He not endow all men with the sense of sight? Take, for example, the blind man of Jericho. As the Gospel tells us, he sat by the wayside, begging. When

he heard the multitude passing by, he asked what the noise was about. When he learned that Jesus was passing, he immediately cried out: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. Our Lord hearing this cry of supplication, stopped and commanded the poor blind man to be brought before Him. Then with the greatest compassion, He asked him: "What wilt thou that I do to thee? And he replied: Lord, that I may see." Great, prodigious was the favor he implored, but it was not difficult, much less was it impossible to obtain. Although blind in body, he was not blind in soul, for he had a most lively faith in the divinity of Christ and also in His infinite power. Hence he merited the favor he was ardently imploring. In that very instant he was cured of the bodily blindness with which he had been afflicted from birth. Overflowing with gratitude he began immediately to follow his Benefactor, heaping praises and blessings upon Him.

II

Faith has truly a most wonderful power. To be convinced of this we need but scan the pages of the Bible and the history of the Church. Our Savior performed all His miracles in order to reward the lively faith of those who had recourse to Him. He promised His disciples that nothing would be impossible to the true believer, and that if they had strong faith they would be able to remove mountains. This promise was fulfilled and substantiated by subsequent facts. By virtue of their faith they accomplished such great and astounding prodigies that they drew the world to the foot of the Cross.

We know moreover that God bestows singular graces and favors upon those imbued with a lively faith in His goodness and who full of confidence have recourse to Him. Who knows what blessings even in the temporal order we might receive from Him! Who knows what consolations and helps would be extended to us, if we only had an ardent faith.

But unfortunately our faith is languid and almost dead. We generally have more faith in ourselves, in our own miserable strength and talents. We usually place more faith in men, and even in dreams, vain superstitions and charms than we do in Divine Providence. For this reason we usually do not obtain the assistance we need, and our prayers remain unheard.

Let us then revive our faith in this age of indifference and incredulity. Thus our faith will be the greatest comfort amid the trials and hardships of life, as it was for the poor blind man of Jericho. It will procure for us the greatest benefits from God, and finally the privilege of possessing and enjoying Him throughout eternity.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Last Wednesday we entered upon the holy season of Lent. The priest signed our foreheads with blessed ashes in the form of a cross, saying to us at the same time: "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return." What a blessing if with the change of seasons, there would also be a change in the lives and habits of men! Would to heaven Lent might become for all Christians what the Church intends it should be, namely, a period of sanctification, of repentance, mortification, and prayer. But unfortunately a great many at the present day recognize no special difference between the various seasons of the liturgical year. During Lent, as well as at other periods, they continue without interruption their life of worldly amusement and dissipation. Let us therefore briefly consider the obligations of the Christian during this penitential season. How should we conduct ourselves during Lent? We must keep Lent as our Savior kept it. Let Him be our model in this respect. By listening attentively to this morning's Gospel we can easily learn what our Savior did, and consequently learn what is expected of us during this holy season.

I

In order to keep Lent our Lord separated Himself entirely from the world and went to conceal Himself in the desert. The world with its distractions is really not the proper place for any one wishing to be occupied with the interests of his soul. The world is fond of revelry, dissipation, and is opposed to a sober, mortified, and Christian mode of living. The world endeavors by a thousand artifices to allure us to join in its pleasures and amuse-

ments. The world despises those who show themselves indifferent to its senseless recreations. Hence if we desire to keep Lent in the proper way, we must detach ourselves from this malignant world and follow Jesus into the wilderness. Does this mean that we must abandon commercial affairs, family ties, and country, and like the anchorites bury ourselves in solitude? Certainly not; but it implies that while remaining in the world corporally, we should be detached from it spiritually, and act in such a way that our souls may be in solitude. We must strive to be deaf to its allurements and distractions. Thus we shall be lifted up to the contemplation of things divine. During Lent more than at any other time of the year, the Christian should have recourse to God, seeking his peace with Him through sincere repentance and true conversion.

We know that God is not found in the midst of worldly tumult. He does not speak to the soul unless He finds it alone, recollected in silence and in prayer. Retire therefore during these forty days with our Lord to the desert. Leave once for all those wicked companions with whom you have so often fallen, and have given so much scandal by improper conversation. To the desert then, or at least far from those places where you laid so many snares to the virtue of others in order to satisfy your own criminal passions; to the desert, or far from those resorts of amusement which are the cess-pool of iniquity, the rendezvous of libertines and loafers who seem unable to open their mouths without offending purity and charity. To the desert, in a word, or far from so many occasions that lead to sin. Abstain, young men, during this holy season, from all your overtures of sensual love and courtship. Abstain, young women, from that vain extravagance in attire. Abstain, in a word, from sin and all that leads to it. Whoever does not decide upon this detachment, whoever fails to choose this salutary retirement, does not keep Lent, and consequently fails to derive that advantage which the Church intends by its institution.

What will it profit you in fact to observe the prescribed fasts and abstinences, to assist at religious functions, to perform other acts of Christian mortification, if meanwhile your heart be not detached from the world to which hitherto you have been blindly enslaved? If denying ungodliness and worldly desires according to the Apostle's admonition, you do not begin to lead a truly better, more virtuous and exemplary life?

While in the desert our Savior spent His whole time in fasting and prayer. For forty days and forty nights He took no nourishment, although He had a human nature subject, like ours, to the same wants and infirmities. His most delightful repast was fervent, continual prayer which He offered for us to His heavenly Father. Every Christian then, like his Divine Master, should fast during this season much more than the Church obliges by special law. We must acknowledge that the fast nowadays differs greatly, not merely from that of our Lord in the desert, but from the fast observed by the primitive Christians. In fact the Church, ever indulgent, adapting herself to the natural weakness of her children, and to the wants of the times, has moderated considerably the law of fasting and abstinence. She has rendered it so easy that nearly all may observe it without inconvenience or difficulty. Yet this salutary law was never so despised and transgressed as at the present day. Many ignore the law of fasting and abstinence, not through necessity, but through pure malice and hatred to the Church and to religion. Like irrational animals they seem to have a taste and relish only for food. They seek only what panders to the senses, neglecting entirely the wants of the soul. They even boast of their iniquity. They repeat the most absurd and ridiculous propositions, asserting that every food is good because created by God, that it makes little difference whether we eat or abstain from flesh-meat provided we do no evil, that our Savior never mentioned any law of fast or abstinence in His Gospel, but that all such laws

emanated from the priests. Nor are such senseless people willing to reflect that even if food be indifferent in its nature, it no longer remains so when once its use is determined by law, as we see demonstrated by the sorrowful example of our first parents. Once God forbade them to eat of the fruit of the tree growing in the middle of the garden; they could not partake of it without committing a grievous sin, which became for them and for all their posterity the cause of so many misfortunes. They do not reflect that even had our Lord Himself not given this precept to mankind, He certainly confided to His Church a legislative power. He imposed upon all Christians the duty of obeying her, going so far as to declare him an infidel who refused her obedience. "He that heareth not the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."

Hence it is evident that he opposes the will of God who refuses to observe the Church's laws, one of which is fasting and abstinence.

Finally, after the example of our Lord, you will frequently raise to heaven the sweet perfume of your prayers. You may say perhaps that you haven't time to pray, because you must earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. That may all be very true. But you are not obliged to recite long prayers. In fact our Savior does not want them. Nevertheless you who are busily engaged at work from early morn till late at night, can and ought to pray continually. And if you ask how this can be done? We reply, by offering to God when you rise in the morning all the labors and hardships of the day, by enduring them all willingly for His sake. "All things whatsoever you do in word or in work, do ye in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ." In this manner you will be praying without realizing it, because your very labor will be a continual prayer highly pleasing in the sight of God. Be on your guard however while at work not to allow angry words, or profane expressions to escape your lips.

You see then it is no great task to keep Lent properly. The Church requires nothing else of us than to detach ourselves from the wicked world, namely to avoid sin and its proximate occasions, to observe that slight fast which she imposes, and from which her ministers will cheerfully dispense us if we have a sufficient reason. Do this and Lent will become for you a time overflowing with blessings and graces, health and contentment. It will render you worthy of reaping abundantly the fruits of redemption.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Last Sunday's Gospel showed us our Lord isolated in the desert. He was separated entirely from all human intercourse, worn out with hunger after a long fast, and afterwards tempted by the devil who sought to make Him fall through perfidious allurements. To-day, on the contrary, He is represented on the summit of a high mountain, radiant with light and divine glory. He is attended by Moses and Elias, the two most illustrious personages of antiquity, and is greeted by His heavenly Father as His well beloved Son. Yesterday Jesus appeared to us in humiliation; to-day, in glory; yesterday in the midst of agony and to-day in joy; yesterday tempted by Satan, to-day adored by Saints; yesterday subjected to the insults of the demon, to-day the source of happiness to the ecstatic Apostles. The Church certainly had a purpose in bringing so near together two phases of our Savior's life so distinct from each other. She desired to impress upon us this important lesson, viz., that only a short distance intervenes between sorrow and joy, that virtuous suffering is speedily followed by sweet contentment. She wished furthermore to teach us that whoever expects to reign one day with Christ in glory, must first of all endeavor to follow Him now in His humiliations. Let us therefore now consider for our advantage this most important truth.

I

The present life is a continual series of sorrowful and pleasant events, the sorrow however greatly predominating. We need not demonstrate what is manifest to all. In this arrangement it will help rather to admire the

providence of God Who for our good has wished our earthly lot to be ever changeable. Uninterrupted happiness would attach us too much to the earth, while continual misfortune would plunge us into despair. When man considers that sorrow and joy alternate, then with the greatest facility he avoids these two rocks that invariably prove fatal to virtue, and he clings to the golden mean which is according to God's designs. Keep this truth well in mind, for it will be a source of comfort to you in the midst of troubles and afflictions. The day comes after night, the summer after winter. War is always succeeded by peace. The sun always seems to shine more brilliantly after a storm. After suffering comes contentment. Daily experience teaches us that our Savior gives consolation to the afflicted even in this life. He consoles not only by diffusing into their hearts a spirit of resignation in the midst of their trials, but also by relieving them of their afflictions, and leading them to their grateful surprise into the paths of peace and happiness which, they imagined, had been forever abandoned. Take the example of Job, who seemed to be the happiest of mortals. He was overloaded with riches, honors and glory. He was looked upon as an oracle by all his fellowmen. Misfortune, however, did not delay in piercing him with its sharpest arrows, and it did not take long for Job to become of all men the most miserable. Who will dry his tears? Who will give back hope to a soul that sighs for death as a welcome relief? The God of consolation, to Whom he confidently had recourse in the hour of sorrow, knew how to change unexpectedly the condition of his faithful servant and make him a thousand times richer, more honored, and happier than he was in the beginning. And Joseph, the chosen son of Jacob, was he not exalted by God after misfortune? In fact by means of his very misfortune was he not raised to the pinnacle of power and glory? His brothers, jealous of seeing him loved more than themselves by their father, impiously deliberated about putting

him to death. They finally decided to sell him in slavery to the merchants of Islam.

In the house of his master the good young man knew how to win the esteem of his captors by his excellent virtues. He was soon regarded not as a slave, but as a familiar acquaintance and friend. Nevertheless misfortune did not cease to follow him. Becoming the victim of a foul calumny, he was cast into prison, where he was left to languish and die. What hope remained for that unfortunate young man, stripped of every earthly good, reduced to slavery in a foreign land, deprived of liberty, of his honor and good name? And yet who would have ever thought it! The austere prison became for Joseph a stepping stone to ascend the throne. Slavery, ignominy, infamy became for him an abundant source of greatness, power and glory. You see then how God causes weeping to be succeeded by rejoicing, and what a short difference intervenes between happiness and misfortune.

For this reason if to-day we are miserable and afflicted, we should not become discouraged, but console ourselves with the thought that perhaps to-morrow the Lord may restore us to happiness. It is with this thought that all good Christians console themselves in the midst of their trials. It is this thought that consoles the Church of God in the midst of the menacing waves of persecution that assail her. Timid Christians beholding the multitudes of enemies, their audacity and strength, seeing the spouse of Christ devoid of every human means, vilified and oppressed more and more every day, they fear that sooner or later she must succumb under the weight of so many persecutions and disappear altogether from the face of the earth. But the Church looks confidently to heaven and exclaims: To-day sorrow and oppression, to-morrow joy and holy exultation. When hell shall have exhausted all my strength in its vicious attacks, the Lord shall manifest His power and come to my assistance. When human

malice shall have reached the climax and all seems lost, then shall I be consoled and rejoice. For then I will know for certain that peace is nigh.

II

Thus ought we conduct ourselves in the midst of the trials of life. Let us remember that we have in heaven a most tender Father. Our destinies are in His hands much more than in the hands of men, and, after having tried us for a short time by sufferings and afflictions, He will render us happy with the gifts of His infinite mercy. Let us remember that we cannot be permitted to behold one day the revealed glory of God in heaven and enjoy Him eternally, unless we now be willing to follow our Divine Master in His humiliations and sufferings. So true is this that you cannot point out a single saint who attained a crown of glory by following a path of roses, or without undergoing in this world the acutest suffering.

All the elect invariably have loved suffering, and frequently have prayed God most fervently not to spare them trials and afflictions, to render them capable of suffering with Him the greatest tribulations. And this indeed is rightfully called true wisdom, although in the world's estimation it may seem the height of folly. Whether we wish it or not, it is the royal road leading to Heaven, the way which Christ taught us by His noble example. The opposite way, the broad road of pleasures and delights may flatter the senses, but it leads away from God and terminates in perdition. Hence we should not envy those following that path; we should not envy those enjoying the pleasures of the present life. They should rather excite our compassion, for we realize where they will end one day with all their enjoyments. It is far better to weep a short while with Christ and then possess eternally the joys of heaven, than to carouse and dissipate with the world for a brief period, and afterwards endure the torments of hell

throughout eternity. No one should delude himself with the foolish idea of enjoying himself both here and hereafter.

Amid the many tribulations of this valley of tears let us therefore look up resignedly to Heaven, and bless the Lord who chastises us because He wishes to save us. Let us bless the Lord because He calls us like the Apostles to follow Him in hardships, humiliations and sorrows, because He wishes to lead us to the holy mount where He shall manifest to us His glory and Divinity. In this beatific vision He shall make us eternally content and happy.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Many and various were the miracles our Savior performed for the benefit of mankind. He commanded the elements, He changed substances, He healed incurable infirmities and even brought the dead back to life. Among so many prodigies, that of expelling an evil spirit from those possessed deserves special mention. To make the lame walk, to restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, to reanimate a corpse, and to accomplish similar other extraordinary and marvellous things, simply means to suspend for a while the regular course of nature's laws which blindly follow God's will. But to liberate those possessed of an evil spirit, according to our mode of understanding, our Lord was obliged to overcome an obstacle. He was compelled to struggle against the obstinacy and power of a proud being that has the malignant instinct to oppose itself to the Divine Will. To-day's gospel records one of these facts, together with the malicious interpretation of it by the Jews and the wise answers of our Divine Lord. Let us therefore fix our attention upon it for a few moments.

I

The devil had taken possession of an unfortunate man, depriving him of the gift of speech. We cannot doubt that the evil spirit has the power, with God's permission, to invade the body of man, causing him to suffer in part those severe chastisements to which he is subjected in consequence of the original fall. Those diabolical invasions which have now almost entirely disappeared, were of quite frequent occurrence in the world before the coming of

Christ, that is, before He destroyed by His death the dominion of Satan. But if the demon has fortunately ceased to molest the body of man, he still torments our souls and subjects them to his tyrannical dominion. How many in fact appear free and masters of themselves, yet are groaning under the yoke of the vilest slavery! They entertain in their hearts the demon that rules them and prepares them for irreparable misery. It is an article of faith that just as God abides in a soul clothed with divine grace, so the demon dwells in the heart of man the moment he becomes guilty of mortal sin. This diabolical invasion of the soul is much more to be feared and lamented than that of the body, because the latter can occur without the fault and against the will of man; while the former is expressly sought and desired by man himself who feels neither remorse nor sorrow, but takes pleasure in rendering slavish homage to the demon oppressor. Consider therefore your company, if you have the misfortune to be in the state of mortal sin. God is no longer with you. He has withdrawn from you, or rather you have banished Him into exile when you committed that grave fault. He Himself assures us that He cannot abide in a heart that is the slave of sin. In God's place you have received into your soul the demon who never leaves you, but remains with you when you work, when you sleep, when you walk and wherever you go. Can you live in peace when you realize that you have continually at your side, in fact that you are constantly harboring within your very soul such an undesirable companion? Could you live tranquilly if you realized that you were constantly followed by a cruel enemy machinating against your life? Could you live in peace if you knew that somewhere in your clothing was concealed a serpent whose venomous bite might at any moment occasion your death? Is not the demon an enemy far more dangerous and fatal than any serpent? If then you have any reason left, you ought at all cost drive him from you, banish him immediately, otherwise you must

admit that either you do not believe what your faith teaches, or that you have reached such a degree of blindness and folly as knowingly to seek your own ruin. But how can you drive the demon from your soul? Do not imagine that a difficult task. In fact it is of all things the easiest. It consists in a simple act of your will.

Just as our Lord compelled the prince of darkness to abandon that unfortunate man, without employing any other means than His efficacious will, so you also can and should liberate yourselves from this fiendish companion, provided you resolve and earnestly desire to bring about his expulsion. No matter how great the power of the demon may be, immeasurably greater is the power of our will, especially when fortified by divine grace. Hence he can do nothing against us when he discovers our will in strenuous opposition.

II

The gospel relates that the wonderful miracle performed by our Lord did not produce a uniform impression upon all those witnessing it.

The common people were filled with amazement. Who in fact would not wonder to see a person hitherto mute, suddenly regain the gift of speech, to behold one liberated from a demon that had been tormenting him for a long time? Yet, not all the spectators were filled with admiration and wonder; some of them were filled with envy and malice. Unable to deny the fact which was self evident, and unwilling to acknowledge the supernatural power of Christ, they preferred to believe an absurd and impossible thing, namely, that the Divine Master cast out devils, not by His own power but by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils. Here we see the baneful effects of hatred and envy. The man allowing himself to be blinded by this vice, despises the merits and virtues of his fellowmen. Without any reason he forms the darkest suspicions and rash judgments against those most deserving

of esteem and respect. He delights in spreading the most shameful calumnies for the purpose of ruining the reputation of his neighbor. This most injurious vice, unworthy not only of the Christian, but of every self-respecting man, is quite commonly practised in the world at the present day.

We see furthermore how incredulity blinds a person and to what extremes it leads him. When he clings to error, not through ignorance but through his own malice, he will not let himself be convinced by the most evident reasons, nor even by the most astounding miracles which he sees with his eyes and touches with his hands. He obstinately denies the miracle and impugns its possibility. He endeavors to strip it of all supernatural character and to explain it away by cavil and sophistry. Rather than appear to be believing, he is not ashamed to render himself ridiculous. That is what the Pharisees did in regard to the miracles of our Savior. That is what infidels and libertines continue to do at the present day in regard to the public and astounding miraculous cures that occur from time to time in the celebrated sanctuaries of the Church throughout the world. With a cold cynicism they deny everything of a supernatural order. They have the utmost contempt for the devout believer, while they take a special pride in boasting of their infidelity.

Our Lord easily refutes the absurd opinion of the Pharisees, reminding them that a kingdom composed of different hostile factions cannot last, that a family torn by dissension and discord soon falls into ruin. Likewise the kingdom of Satan could not stand, if the members composing it were hostile to each other. From this He draws the necessary consequence that they must recognize in Him a divine power, and finally acknowledge that God has established His kingdom in their midst.

But in spite of the evident arguments He adduced, and the startling miracles He performed, we do not read of our Savior having succeeded in converting those hardened

hearts. Not even our Lord Himself converts him who refuses to be converted. What happened to the unbelievers of antiquity is repeated in the case of modern infidels. Usually they are not converted, because they do not wish to see the light. They prefer to walk in darkness, because they cherish the delusion that faith warps and darkens the human mind, while as a matter of fact it tends only to broaden and enlighten it.

Be therefore on your guard against the blast of infidelity universally prevailing, lest it should extinguish in your hearts the light of faith. If once it goes out, a miracle from God will be required to re-kindle it in your souls. Be on your guard, warns the Apostle, and let no man seduce you with impious, irreligious and vain words. These malignant seducers you encounter in every walk of life. Pay no heed to them but pity rather their unfortunate condition. Cling tenaciously to that faith which constitutes our glory, our grandeur, our only true happiness.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Church may have selected for to-day's Gospel a miracle occurring shortly before the Jewish Pasch in order to remind us of the great Christian Passover — Easter Sunday. It is the miraculous multiplication of five barley loaves and two fishes made by our Lord in the wilderness in order to satiate the hunger of five thousand persons who had been fasting for three days. This prodigy aptly illustrates the Holy Eucharist in which our Savior's Presence is miraculously multiplied. With the miracle of the loaves is connected the important discourse which our Lord held the following day at Capharnaum. Having fed the multitude, He gradually drew their attention away from the nourishment of the body to that of the soul. "Labor not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting which the Son of Man will give you. For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him, and I will raise him up on the last day." St. John tells us that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." We firmly believe that He still continues to dwell amongst us in the sacrament of His love, the Holy Eucharist. Unfortunately many, for various unreasonable pretexts, neglect to receive this food of angels.

I

As the life of the body would languish and our strength decay, should we refuse our ordinary food, so the vigor and life of our soul cannot continue, unless we feed upon

this divine food. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you." If the flesh and blood of our Lord be necessary to the spiritual life of the Christian, then certainly hungering and thirsting after it is necessary to his health and good condition. There is not a clearer sign of a diseased constitution, either in the natural or spiritual man, than either to long for what is not his proper food or to lack appetite for that which is.

Commenting on the dispositions of a worthy communicant, St. Augustine reckons hunger and thirst among the number. And rightly so, for the Blessed Sacrament is represented to us in Holy Scripture as food and drink, as the Lord's Supper. While thus expressed in the New Testament, it was also prefigured in the Old Testament by types of the same nature, such as the tree of life in the garden of Paradise, the bread and wine offered by Melchisedech, the manna of the desert, the paschal lamb, the water springing from the rock and of which the Israelites drank in the wilderness.

As these scriptural figures represent the nature and efficacy of the Blessed Sacrament as the food of the soul, as the life and strength of the spiritual man, so they also imply one part of our preparation for worthily receiving it. If it be really spiritual food and drink, what more suitable preparation than hunger and thirst?

We should come then to those fountains of salvation as the hart panting after the fountains of water, so touchingly described by the psalmist. If we could imagine with what eagerness the parched and weary Israelites imbibed the refreshing waters that bubbled forth in the wilderness, we would have some notion of the hunger and thirst with which we ought to approach and receive Holy Communion.

The man suffering from thirst or hunger will surmount every obstacle in order to slake his thirst or appease his appetite. He will not easily allow anything to hinder him, much less will he invent excuses to prevent him from

taking food or drink. Yet there is nothing however trivial and insignificant which does not serve as a pretext to keep men from receiving Holy Communion.

A sense of unworthiness may for a time prevent a free and cheerful reception of the sacraments. But those troubled in this manner should strive to rid themselves of all unreasonable fears. It is only feigned humility which keeps us from fulfilling a necessary duty. Abstinence from it can never be good, except accidentally when it is to prepare ourselves with greater reverence. To communicate with carefulness is good in itself. That which is good in itself should be preferred to what is only good accidentally. If Holy Communion be worthily received, it increases not only our love of God, but our reverence also. That is the best reverence to God which most acknowledges His authority. Disobedience or neglect of duty forms no part of true humility.

Some may say that they are not fit to go. The man not fit for this holy ordinance is not fit for heaven. What will he do when he comes to die? Will anyone plead on judgment day his unfitness as an excuse for disobedience? Will anyone dare to say: Lord, I would have come often to the Supper to which Thou didst invite me, but I was unfit? I gave way to a constant course of temptation. In fact I never had any eager desire for it. My trade, my business, or daily work took up my whole attention. People obliged to support a family have something else to think of besides religion. Do you think that such a flimsy pretext will save you? You know how useless such excuses were to ward off the anger of the king from those who sought to justify their absence from the wedding feast. Holy Communion ought not to be neglected. It should be devoutly and frequently received. It is a feast to which God Himself invites us. To neglect it is a contempt of God's provision and condescension. God Who is infinitely great appoints no trifling ordinance. To slight it is therefore to slight His wisdom and His greatness. It

is also commanded by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: "Amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you." It ought to be enough for us that it has His sanction and authority.

The time also in which our Lord instituted the Blessed Sacrament shows that it should not be neglected. It was a short while before His death. "The same night in which He was betrayed, He took bread, blessed it and gave it to His disciples, saying: take ye and eat of this, for this is my body. In like manner also taking the chalice of wine, He blessed it and gave it to His disciples, saying: Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new testament which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins."

Men are not accustomed to engage in trivial matters when at the point of death. We may then easily infer the necessity as well as the value of the Holy Eucharist from the time of its institution. This circumstance surely indicates that it is most worthy of our esteem and most undeserving of our neglect.

The last words and wishes of dying relatives and friends are generally regarded as most sacred. They are by no means forgotten or neglected. Who is there with heart so hardened that would not strive to execute the dying request of a mother or father? Shall we undervalue by neglect, not simply the request, but the explicit command of a dying Savior? Yet there are in this world such inhuman wretches who scorn that command. There may be just such individuals here this morning who have neglected the sacraments for years.

Let us be at least as grateful to our Divine Redeemer as the multitude in the desert. For them He multiplied a material bread but once; while for us He daily multiplies the bread of angels which is His own adorable Body, and with this precious food He daily nourishes us. Let us not refuse this celestial bread which He continually offers us

in the Eucharistic banquet, but let us nourish our souls with it frequently, in order finally to obtain that immortality promised to those who receive it worthily. "He that eateth this bread shall live forever."

PASSION SUNDAY

The tongue is usually the faithful interpreter of our thoughts, the instrument through which the disposition, character and moral qualities of man are revealed, for it speaks from the abundance of the heart. If it often tries to dissimulate and conceal the criminal sentiments of the soul by adopting the language of falsehood, sooner or later it will betray itself unconsciously, and even without wishing, its hidden iniquity will come to the surface. Of this we will be persuaded by meditating on the discussion that took place one day in the temple of Jerusalem between the Divine Master and a crowd of malignant Jews. The beauty and nobility of His character are revealed in His candid, dignified, and tranquil remarks, while the insolent language of His enemies betrays, in spite of them, the vile passions they fostered, although they strove hard to conceal them beneath the mask of regular and virtuous behavior.

We see the light shining in darkness, the sanctity of Christ in contrast with human perversity. This contrast will enable us to understand better the infinite distance separating the person of the Incarnate Word from the crowd of His malicious accusers.

I

For our sake the Son of God wished to humble Himself to the extent of clothing Himself with all our miseries, except sin, because it was repugnant to His divine nature. Humility being truth, He was obliged to proclaim to the world His absolute innocence, so that men might not believe Him a sinner upon beholding Him clothed with its

appearance. Hence with that candor characteristic of one whose conscience is entirely free from reproach, He said to His enemies: "Which of you shall convince me of sin?" The man without fault, the man just and innocent in every respect, is worthy of credence when he speaks, when he teaches, when he announces the truth. It cannot be supposed for a moment that he would become a teacher of error, of falsehood, as that would be the height of malice and irreligion. That being the case, why do you not believe me? It is an evident sign that your hearts are not right, that you do not wish to know the truth, and therefore that you do not belong to God. He that is of God eagerly heareth the words of God which are truth itself.

That is indeed a solemn condemnation which ought to cause all those to tremble who openly rebel against the infallible teaching of the Catholic Church, authorized to preach to the world the true doctrine of Jesus Christ. It should fill those with fear who prefer to follow the uncertain guide of human reason, and to listen eagerly to the apostles of Satan who from the platform, through magazines, books and pamphlets spread the most pernicious maxims in the midst of society in order to destroy religious belief and conduct.

Without regard to human respect our Lord pronounced a severe but just verdict on the criminal behavior of His enemies, not in order to offend them, but for the purpose of admonishing and saving them. Yet to His calm reasoning those malignant people replied insultingly and with infernal hatred: "Do we not say well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?" In hearing the atrocious blasphemy, the sacrilegious insult of those unfortunates, does it not seem as if listening to socialists, freethinkers and agnostics of the present day who, not knowing how to reply to the solid arguments of those defending the truth and showing the fallacy of unbelief, the turpitude of vice, they resort to abuse, imagining that they can obscure

the truth by covering it with the filth of their sarcasms, their insults and calumnies? Abuse is the weapon of error, but an impotent weapon usually proving fatal to the user. It cannot prevent truth from finally prevailing and illuminating the world with its serene light.

To the insult offered, our Savior replied with His usual calmness that He had not a devil, as they asserted, that He honored His Father, without seeking His own glory, because there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Who this vindicator of His glory was, He expressly told them, saying: "It is my Father that glorifieth me, of Whom you say that He is your God." And this God, truly His Father, will vindicate His glory in the most splendid manner. He will avenge the glory of His humiliated Son by leading Him from the ignominy of His passion and death to the triumph of His resurrection. He will vindicate the glory of His only begotten Son by giving Him as inheritance all nations and extending His kingdom over the face of the earth, a kingdom of grace and love that shall have no end. He shall vindicate the glory of His Son by scattering His proud enemies like dust before the wind, by abandoning their temple and city to destruction, by dispersing them as fugitives over the earth, an execration to God and to men. His vindication shall occur in that awful day when appearing with great power and majesty, the conqueror of death and hell, He shall pronounce sentence of eternal malediction upon His enemies, casting them into the lower abyss as the victims of His divine vengeance.

But did He not vindicate in all ages the glory of His Son, and does He not vindicate it even at the present day in a manner most sublime? Do we not in fact see Christ and His Church assailed by all the artifices of fraud and violence? Yet in spite of all attacks Christ and His Church ever remain triumphant, while their enemies disappear from the scene of life, leaving behind them a name covered with infamy. At times the Church seems to groan under the yoke of tyranny and persecution in some

part of Christendom. But we need not fear the final result, because we know that God is ever watching and will vindicate the glory of His Son. "There is one that seeketh and judgeth."

II

After having repudiated the unworthy calumny of His enemies in order to remove all scandal to the weak, our Lord continued to proclaim His heavenly doctrine, saying: "Amen I say to you, if any man keep my word, he shall not see death forever." He was evidently speaking, not of temporal but of spiritual death which they would certainly incur, if they refused to believe in Him and in the doctrine He was announcing to the multitude. But blinded by hatred those deluded people simply repeated their former calumny. Misinterpreting either through malice or ignorance the sense of His words, they exclaimed: "Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest; If any man keep my word he shall not taste death forever. Art thou greater than our father Abraham who is dead? and the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself?" To such a question He could have truthfully replied: I am the Son of God, the consubstantial Word of the Father, the promised Redeemer, and consequently infinitely greater than your father Abraham. But the bare truth would have simply enraged them the more without penetrating their hearts which had become hard as flint. Nevertheless he wished to show in an indirect manner the nobility of His origin, which infinitely surpassed that of Abraham who, on account of his faith and virtues, had deservedly become the head of a progeny more numerous than the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea. He ardently desired to behold the Christ conversing with men, and became the founder of an immense people crowned with immortal glory. And he rejoiced with an ineffable joy when he beheld Him in spirit through a

revelation Almighty God granted him on account of his great faith. Hence our Lord openly asserted His divine Sonship, His eternal origin, declaring that He already was before Abraham came into existence, before time began, because He was generated from all eternity in the bosom of His Father. "Amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am."

At this declaration those perverts could no longer control their anger. Passing from insult to injury, "they took up stones to cast at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple," thus giving them a proof of His infinite power. This is the greatest chastisement that God inflicts upon a soul resisting the inspirations of His grace, despising His benefits, refusing His invitations, and purposely closing his eyes so as not to see the light of truth shining before him. God abandons that person. He hides Himself, leaving that soul buried in a fatal blindness which will be the cause of its eternal ruin.

Let us therefore beg our Lord to preserve us from such a misfortune, and give us the grace to listen always with docility to His voice which becomes for us a fountain of peace, salvation, and life. Let us beseech Him not to deprive us of His holy word, but that it may rather sound in our ears with penetrating accents, and with Samuel let us say to Him: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." This disposition of the soul, this humble docility exercises a most potent influence on the heart of God Who ardently longs to speak to His beloved creatures in order to lead them to Himself, and thus make them one day partakers of His eternal glory.

PALM SUNDAY

Celebrated in history are the triumphal entries of so many emperors into proud Rome, followed by a long train of conquered kings and the riches confiscated from subjugated nations. Those were the victories, not of love, but of brute force. They cost rivers of tears and torrents of blood. They awakened in the hearts of the conquered a mortal hatred feverishly awaiting the opportunity for revenge. Far from bringing peace to the world, they were frequently the harbingers of new and more terrible disasters. How different from these was the triumphal entry of the King of peace this day into the capital of the mystic kingdom which He came to establish upon earth! He founded it, not by force of arms nor by the annihilation of opposing armies, but by the price of His blood and the sacrifice of His life. Here all is peace, content, and love. He is not accompanied by formidable warriors, nor by a procession of prisoners heaping maledictions upon the conqueror and weeping over their own misfortunes. He is greeted, on the contrary, by the serene joy and sincere exultation of an entire populace singing hosannas to Him that cometh in the name of the Lord. Let us contemplate and meditate upon this fascinating triumph of our Divine Redeemer. While enjoying the pleasure it produces in our souls, let us not fail to reap the precious fruit which, even after so many centuries, its sole recollection is capable of inspiring.

I

In the first place let us imagine to ourselves the scene of that solemn event. The triumphal procession began in the

humble village of Bethphage, situated at the foot of Mount Olivet. Passing around the side of the mountain, it traversed the narrow valley of Jehoshaphat, and ascending the declivity of Moria it entered the Holy City through the Beautiful Gate, continuing until it reached the sacred precincts of the temple. The way was short but grandiose and magnificent, owing to the beauty of the locality and the poetic charm of the natural scenery. The Divine Master gave forethought to the preparations for this triumphant entry. They were indeed simple, but most expressive in their simplicity. He will not occupy a gorgeous chariot drawn by spirited steeds, as was the custom observed by ordinary conquerors, but He will be seated upon an ass. On this occasion our Lord departs from His usual custom of making His journeys on foot. But how can He make provision for this journey in His poverty? We must not forget that He is the Lord and Master of heaven and earth, to Whom all things belong, and Whom all creatures obey.

He therefore said to two of His disciples: "Go ye into the village that is over against you, and immediately you shall find an ass tied and a colt with her; loose them and bring them to me. And if any man shall say anything to you, say ye that the Lord hath need of them, and forthwith he will let them go. And going their way they found the colt tied before the gate without, in the meeting of two ways: and they loose him. And some of them that stood there, said to them: What do you, loosing the colt? And they replied as Jesus had commanded them; and they let him go with them. (Mark xi, 4.)

On that occasion Christ showed that He was really God, for He gave a solemn proof of His omniscience and the absolute dominion He holds over all things. As God He is everywhere present. He knows all things, sees all things. He disposes all things with wonderful order and precision. Not only does He admirably regulate the principal and most important events, but even the most minute

circumstances and details which might seem in themselves insignificant and of no consequence. Nothing can escape His all-penetrating gaze, nor can anything resist His divine will. Being absolute Master of all things, He can dispose of them as He chooses, without anyone rightfully claiming to be unjustly treated. God certainly holds supreme dominion over every creature, and man is simply the custodian always subject to the will of the Creator. Convinced of this solemn truth which both faith and reason evidently demonstrate, let us not stop to consider the immediate causes producing the events of life, but rather direct our attention to the First Cause, and in every event let us adore that Divine Providence which regulates and governs all things with infinite wisdom.

If the Lord deprives us of what we hold dear upon earth, let us not break out in lamentations against the wise dispensations of His will, but rather bow our heads in resignation, exclaiming more with our hearts than with our lips: "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be always His Holy Name." Jesus sat upon the beast over which the disciples out of reverence had spread their garments. It was perhaps the first time our Savior had allowed Himself this luxury in travelling. During the three years of His public mission He was always seen journeying on foot from morning until night through the towns and cities of Palestine, suffering all kinds of hardship and fatigue, in order to teach us by His example that His true followers should lead lives of humility, sacrifice, and continual mortification.

The sun was setting when that solemn procession began, and according as it advanced, the crowds of people increased around our Divine Redeemer. Everyone sought to render Him homage. Some spread their garments before Him, as is customary in the Orient to do for members of the royal families. Others cut down palm and olive branches to scatter along the way, while the vast throng preceding and following Him gave vent to their

gladness by exclaiming with holy enthusiasm: "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

Let us reflect for a moment on this solemn event. Who prepared this extraordinary ovation for our Divine Redeemer? Who gathered about Him as if by magic that immense concourse of people? Who inspired them to make that sudden demonstration of faith and love? to acknowledge and recognize Him as the Son of David, as the true Messiah promised by God, foretold by the patriarchs and prophets, and ardently desired by the nations? There was nothing artificial in it, but it proceeded naturally and spontaneously. It was not like any of those cunning demonstrations gotten up for the occasion through the expenditure of gold and the engineering of some scheming politician. No, it was a most holy, popular enthusiasm decreed and promoted by Almighty God to vindicate the glory of His Son Who had been repudiated by the Sanhedrim. It was God Who assembled that multitude and enlightened them in order that they might recognize the hidden majesty of Christ. It was God Who incited them to render Him that public homage, proclaiming His divine character and sublime mission. It was God Who wished the dignity of Christ to be openly proclaimed by the same people who shortly afterwards would reject Him, exclaiming: "Away with Him; let Him be crucified," so that from the contrast of these two solemn events occurring so near each other, the enormity of their crime of deicide and the perfidy of their ingratitude might become more evident.

With this example before us what importance can we attach to the esteem and opinion of the world, to which so many sacrifice even their conscience? What importance can we attach to the opinion of the mob that is so fickle, so inconstant in its convictions — the rabble that can always be purchased with money, that to-day raises you to the sky and to-morrow casts you down into the

mire? Oh, let us despise the flatteries of the world, and be solicitous for the esteem and good opinion of God by following always in our conduct the dictates of conscience and those of His holy law.

While imitating the multitude in professing publicly our faith in Jesus Christ as our Divine Redeemer, and preparing for Him a triumphal entrance into our hearts by Holy Communion on Easter Sunday, let us beware of following them in their fickleness and inconstancy. On this occasion they shouted: Hosanna. Five days later they were yelling for His crucifixion! To-day: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." On the following Friday: "Away with Him, let Him be crucified." Now He is addressed as King; a few days later, they have no king but Cæsar. To-day He is met with palms and olive branches; on Friday He is crowned with thorns and nailed to the cross. Now they spread their garments on the road before Him; on Friday they ignominiously strip Him of His garments and upon His vesture they cast lots. Far be it from us then to imitate this fickle multitude, by relapsing into mortal sin, and thus crucifying Jesus anew after He has made His triumphant entry into our hearts through Easter Holy Communion.

EASTER SUNDAY

This is a day of immortal glory for Christ, and also for us a day of joy and holy exultation. A day of immortal glory for Christ Who, after the ignominy and tortures of a cruel martyrdom, arose again to a new life conquering the tyrannical dominion of death. A day of joy and holy exultation for us, because since we are living members of that mystic body of which Christ is the head, we must of necessity share in His glorious destiny. After weeping at the foot of the cross over His agonizing death, it is proper that we should rejoice at the recollection of His imposing victory.

Another motive justifying and rendering our exultation still more complete is the fact that we also have risen with Christ. Through His infinite mercy we also have passed from the death of sin to the life of grace, sharing in the holy mysteries which are the precious fruit of His divine redemption. We may therefore justly repeat with the Church that "this is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein." In order to appreciate all the more that pure joy characteristic of the present festival, let us accompany in spirit the holy women who, as the Evangelist relates, hastened early in the morning to honor the lifeless remains of their Divine Master.

I

When the mind is tortured by profound sorrow and we retain the vivid impression of some harrowing scene which keeps us in a state of perturbation, it is impossible for us to yield to slumber. How then could those holy women sleep? They had witnessed the divine tragedy of Calvary, the crucifixion of a God. They must have

had that bloody scene constantly before them. The blasphemies of the rabble and their cries of — Crucify Him — were ringing continually in their ears. Add to this the grief they felt in their hearts at losing Him Whom they held most dear. No! Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who dearly loved their crucified Redeemer, must have slept very little during those long nights in which His lifeless Body remained enclosed in the sepulchre. Sleep was banished all the more as the thought of an arduous undertaking inspired by love was preoccupying their attention. They wished to assuage their grief by an act of devotion, namely, by embalming the Body of Jesus. Sorrowfully and silently therefore they proceeded to the sepulchre before the break of day while the wicked city was still wrapt in profound slumber.

Sleep on, oh perfidious Jerusalem! At thy awakening thou shalt be witness of the glorious triumph of Him Whom you saw with satanic joy expiring upon the cross. Know that your joy will be changed to rage upon beholding your vain hopes frustrated. The God Whom you defied upon His cross has risen from the tomb. He shall now dazzle you with His glory, overwhelm you with His majesty, and by His power fill you with terror in anticipation of His divine vengeance.

The idea of the great event did not even occur to the holy women. The thought uppermost in their minds was the fear of not being able to enter the sepulchre, and of being prevented from accomplishing the reverential duty that had brought them. Hence they said one to another: "Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" Their perturbation of mind and the most ardent desire of rendering their Master this last attestation of love had impeded them in the beginning from considering this difficulty. But the difficulty immediately vanished. No sooner had they approached the tomb than they perceived to their amazement the stone already rolled

back. Their astonishment gave way to fear when they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and guarding, as it were, the sepulchre which would henceforth become glorious among all nations. It was the angel of God who descended from heaven at the moment in which the Redeemer came forth from the tomb without need of opening it, just as He came forth at the time of His nativity from His Mother's womb without violating her virginity. It was the angel of God who had rolled back the stone in order that every one might see with his eyes the accomplishment of the miracle. It was the angel of God who announced to the holy women and to the entire world the resurrection of Christ, just as the angels had previously announced the glad tidings of His birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem. "You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified?" he said. "He is risen, He is not here." The living is not to be found among the dead. If you believe not my words, be persuaded by the evidence of the fact. "Behold the place where they laid Him." The sepulchre is empty. Death in spite of itself was obliged to restore its prey to the conqueror. How wonderful are the ways of Divine Providence! This solemn event which was to exercise so great an influence over the destinies of the world, this great truth of our Lord's resurrection which was to form the centre and basis of all religion and the most convincing proof of His Divinity, was announced first to three poor women. They had also the honor of the first visit of the risen Savior in preference to all the other disciples. A woman indeed merited this honored privilege and to be preferred to man in the fruition of Heaven's favors. In spite of her apparent weakness she showed herself more constant, courageous and stronger in the hour of danger and sacrifice. It was woman in fact that drank to the dregs the bitter chalice of His passion; it was woman that accompanied Christ on the sorrowful way of Golgotha and wiped His forehead covered

with sweat and blood; it was woman that shed tears of compassion upon His sorrows, whilst the insolent mob heaped upon Him insults and maledictions. When forsaken by all, it was woman that planted herself fearlessly at the foot of the cross and consoled Him with her prayers and tears. While His enemies blasphemed Him, she remained faithful at His side in spite of all natural repugnances and cruel anxiety of heart until his last breath. Let us learn from this that we shall share in the joys of the resurrection and the favors of heaven, in proportion as we have taken part in the passion of Christ. Hence let us bear manfully the cross of tribulation, and stand faithfully at His side not only as the disciples amid the splendors of Tabor, but also as the holy women during the ignominy of Calvary; not only as the multitude while He feeds us with the bread of consolation, but also when He chastises us and wishes us to be His companions in suffering. Let us ever bear in mind that the cross is the only way leading us to glory and to true happiness.

After the angel of the Lord had announced the resurrection of Christ to the holy women, he bade them carry this joyful news to the disciples and to Peter. How the amiable character of the Lord is revealed in this incident! Those disciples had all cowardly abandoned Him in the hour of danger, without thinking of Him, without giving Him the slightest token of their love and gratitude. He now as a loving shepherd goes in quest of the stray sheep. He takes pains to make them return to the fold, and forgetting entirely their ungrateful perfidy, He anxiously awaits the moment to receive them with open arms. The proof of such infinite goodness should always inspire us with hope of forgiveness, and although we may feel ourselves burdened with miseries and sins, we should never hesitate to place all our confidence in our Divine Redeemer Who is pleased to manifest His omnipotence in tolerating and pardoning the greatest sinners.

But why does our Lord wish His resurrection to be an-

nounced especially to Peter? Here again is a new and more splendid proof of our Savior's love. Peter had surpassed all his associates in perfidy towards His Divine Master. Not only did he abandon Him, but he even had the audacity to deny Him three times under His own eyes through fear of a maid servant. Behold how the loving heart of Jesus takes revenge! The greater the offender, the more copiously does our Lord allow him to experience the ineffable tenderness of His infinite love. And proof of His noble revenge was to make him His Vicar, His representative upon earth, the visible head of His Church. This Peter, so greatly loved, honored, and signalized by the Son of God, never dies, but always lives throughout the ages in the Church of Christ. He is the Roman Pontiff, the Supreme Head of the Church who has received the commission of feeding all the sheep of the Christian fold. If our Divine Master, during His earthly sojourn and after His glorious resurrection has always honored and wished His Vicar to be honored by all, He teaches us by example the duty incumbent on all His faithful followers. We owe respect, obedience, and love to him who rules the Church in the name of Christ and takes His place. This duty we owe under pain of being cut off as withered members of the mystic body of Christ.

This solemn truth has become at the present day a stumbling block to so many unfortunate Christians and the fatal cause of their eternal perdition; for a sacrilegious war is even now being waged against the Sovereign Pontiff through the instigation of Satan who employs every means to destroy that foundation on which rests the great edifice of the Catholic Church. How many unfortunates have allowed themselves to be swept along by this impetuous torrent and have raised the standard of rebellion against the venerable, unarmed occupant of the Vatican! To these all weapons are legitimate even the most vile, such as deceit, falsehood, calumny, treachery. Over in

Italy that man is considered a good patriot who excels his neighbor in this contemptible warfare. What a disheartening spectacle to behold so much apostasy in the midst of Christian society! Let us be always loyal and devoted to the Sovereign Pontiff, and listen with docility to his teachings which he frequently announces through his admirable encyclicals. Let us reverentially follow his commands, earnestly beseeching our Lord to free him soon from the hands of his enemies, and grant him complete victory. Assist him according to your means by contributing generously to the annual Peter's Pence. When the impious are bold in assailing and vilifying him, let us be fearless and courageous in sustaining and defending his cause, which is the cause of God. It can truthfully be said that the life of the Sovereign Pontiff was and always will be a perfect copy of the life of Christ. The passion is followed by the resurrection. After ignominy comes glory and triumph. Do you wish to share in the triumph which the Lord is admirably and mysteriously preparing for His Church and for His Vicar upon earth?

Then remain steadfast and loyal to your leader, combating courageously at his side, like the holy women who remained loyally at the cross of Christ. And just as they shared in the holy joy of His resurrection, you also will have the good fortune to join the Church in singing a hymn of exultation when we shall see the papacy restored through God's grace to a new life.

LOW SUNDAY

Our Savior could have ascended into heaven immediately after His resurrection, because His mission on earth was practically completed. Yet He wished to remain here forty days in order to convince the most incredulous that His resurrection was real, genuine, and not the fantastic dream of a visionary. He stayed on earth forty days after His resurrection, says the catechism, to show that He was truly risen from the dead, and to instruct His Apostles. If there have been and still are so many blind people unwilling to believe this extraordinary prodigy in spite of the most cogent proofs placing its truth in evidence, imagine whether the human mind could be induced to accept it without these arguments which our Lord afforded us through His repeated apparitions. He appeared to Mary Magdalen and her companions returning from the sepulchre. He manifested Himself to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and they recognized Him in the breaking of bread. He appeared to Simon Peter alone; then to all the Apostles, except Thomas; and again to all of them, Thomas included. According to St. Paul, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once. He appeared finally to the chosen eleven in whose presence He ascended into heaven. This morning's gospel records but two of these apparitions which are most interesting on account of the circumstances accompanying them.

In the first one He invested His Apostles with a divine power and defined their mission. In the second one He overcame and expelled the incredulity of Thomas, one of His disciples who persisted in denying His resurrection.

Let us listen with respectful attention to these two gospel facts which were written for our salutary instruction.

I

On the evening of the very same Sunday on which our Savior arose from the tomb, the Apostles were gathered in a room with closed doors, through fear of the Jews. Suddenly the risen Master appears before them and greets them with the comforting salutation: "Peace be with you." He shows them His hands and His side — those hands and side that bore the indelible marks of His cruel martyrdom. The greeting and apparition were a balm to their hearts that stood in need of peace and faith. Hence, according to the Evangelist, "the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." His sacred presence soon banishes all sorrow from the soul and changes grief into joy. Your own experience will convince you of this truth. When afflicted, cast yourselves at the feet of your crucified Redeemer or before the tabernacle containing His most sacred Body, and you will depart with your heart full of consolation. When tribulations assail you, seek the Savior of mankind. Receive Him in the sacrament which He established for our consolation. Unite yourselves to Him in Holy Communion, and this union will afford you the sweetest comfort. Ask the sick and dying what joy they experience when they hear the greeting of peace which the priest brings in the name of God to the home and to all its inmates. "Peace be to this house and to all that dwell therein." All the expressions of sympathy and affection which they receive from relatives and friends are nothing compared to this divine consolation. After our Lord had repeated His greeting of peace to the Apostles, He added: "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." Your mission in the world differs not from mine, but is simply a continuation of it. My Father sent me upon earth to announce the truth to mankind, and I also send you to preach my gospel to all

nations. The Father hath sent me to wage open war upon all the passions. I also send you to combat them in order that you may be defenders of virtue that is despised. The Father sent me into the world to redeem it. I also send you to labor for the salvation of mankind. The Father sent me to suffer and die; I also send you as sheep among wolves, in order that you may be ready to suffer every adversity, even death itself, for love of me and for the profession of my name. This mission of the Apostles is also our mission, because we are their lawful sucessors inheriting their eminent dignity as well as their most important obligations. And you should have this exalted idea of us, if you wish to be benefited by the labors of our ministry. You should adopt more or less the following mode of reasoning: The priest is not an ordinary individual like the rest of men, but one purposely destined by God to help me save my soul. He is the person who must lead me to Heaven. The priest is the one who freed me from the slavery of the demon by cleansing my soul in the salutary waters of baptism. He frequently reconciled me to God in the tribunal of penance. He sanctified my marriage at the foot of the altar. He frequently nourished my soul with the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. He is the person who stimulates my devotion by his ministrations in the church, imparts to me the word of God, and instructs me in my duties. When the shadows of death are drawing near, the priest will fortify my soul with the consolations of religion. He will administer to me the sacraments intended to strengthen me in my last agony. And after my soul has taken flight, he will pray that God may grant me peace and rest. He is the angel to whom God has entrusted my spiritual care, and he is my greatest benefactor. Therefore it is just and proper that I should love, venerate and respect him. It is right that I should listen with docility to his advice and admonitions.

The gospel relates that in this apparition of our Lord,

Thomas was not present. The other disciples therefore said to him: "We have seen the Lord." But he replied: "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." From this you can see how proud and exacting his incredulity was. Thomas believes more in himself than in the unanimous assertions of his fellow Apostles who were honest men and incapable of lying. Thomas is not satisfied with beholding the resurrection of Christ with his eyes, he wants to feel it with his hands. All the other Apostles had partaken of the Easter joy by offering to Jesus the homage of their faith. He alone persisted in his unwillingness to celebrate his Easter, and by his obstinacy deprived himself of the pleasures and graces the Lord had prepared for him. Do we not behold in this disciple an image of those Christians who refuse to join the other faithful in celebrating the resurrection of Christ? Do we not see in him a figure of those who refuse to approach the sacraments during the Easter time, thus depriving themselves of the benefits and consolations which the Church affords her children?

If those unhappy people were only present in the church to hear my words, I would remind them that the Easter time extends from the First Sunday of Lent to Trinity Sunday. If they fail to present themselves in the tribunal of penace during that period, they become guilty of mortal sin. I would remind them that even after the lapse of the interval established for the fulfilment of the Church's precept, they must not imagine that the obligation ceases, for it always remains in force until fulfilled. I would ask them to reflect that death will overtake us when we least expect it. I would beseech them . . . but what's the use? It would be like preaching to the wind. No impression would be made upon their hardened hearts, and the unfortunates would perhaps in their religious indifference simply laugh at all

my admonitions, prayers, and menaces. It will be perhaps wise for me earnestly to exhort you to pray for your indifferent brethren, so that God, Who holds their hearts in His hands, may move them to compunction and convert them. Nor can we doubt that He shall fail to hear us, because we know that He shows Himself so merciful and benign even with the most obdurate sinners. We know in fact how indulgent He was with the Apostle Thomas. Eight days after He deigned to appear again in order to convert him, literally satisfying his excessive pretensions. Turning to him, He said: "Put in thy finger hither and see my hands, and bring hither thy hand and put it into my side, and be not faithless but believing." Filled with confusion at the infinite goodness of his Divine Master, he answered immediately with lively faith and ardent love: "My Lord and my God."

Thomas was easily won over, for he was not incredulous through malice. But it is not so easy to persuade those who are unbelievers through design, those who are unwilling to believe, in order not to curb their passions, to amend their sinful lives. When unbelief has its roots in the corruption of the heart, then indeed is it difficult to eradicate it and to bring man back to sound moral principles. Many do not wish to believe in the soul's immortality, the existence of a future life, and put forth the absurdity that the world happened by chance, that man through a series of infinite evolutions descended from a monkey, that everything terminates with death. Why do they deny these truths? Do you think that it is through intellectual conviction? Not at all, because it is impossible for the human mind to believe in an absurdity. They simply deny them to flatter their passions. They deny them, not because persuaded of their non-existence, but because they wish those truths didn't exist. That is the kind of infidels we have at the present day: miserable creatures who boast of their shame and iniquity, objects of pity and contempt. Let us not follow them, but con-

sider rather the example of Thomas. From his very unbelief which gave way to the evidence of the truth, let us learn to yield our minds with docility to the teachings of that religion, whose truth can never be impugned.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The words of our Savior read in to-day's gospel exhale a fragrance of paradise and are so overflowing with tenderness that they touch the most delicate chords of the human heart. It is God Who speaks to man a language which he had never heard before. It is God Who reveals to man the ardor of an infinite love. It is God Who manifests, as it were, to man the program of those magnanimous designs which He has decreed to accomplish in order to render him eternally happy. Compared to this true friend, to this great benefactor of poor fallen humanity, how abject those impostors appear who promise to the unfortunate people a new era of prosperity, of greatness and glory, while they render them victims of their own selfish ambitions and unbridled cupidity! Let us hear how this amiable Redeemer speaks of Himself, the promises He makes, the benefits He daily confers upon us, and undoubtedly the ardor of His charity will inflame our hearts with a feeling of gratitude.

I

We can say truthfully that one great and sublime ambition of our Divine Lord is to love us. The love of poor fallen man seems to consume Him, and at the same time to form His greatest glory, His most cherished delight. Hence He seems to neglect the glorious names recalling His sovereign greatness. He selects from among them the one expressing in some measure His infinite love for us, and tells us frankly: "I am the good shepherd."

Since, however, both before and after His time, there has been and will be many who unjustly usurp this glorious

title, He therefore indicates the qualities of the good shepherd, the difference between him and the hireling. Thus we are enabled to conclude from the observation of facts that He alone deserves the name of shepherd among so many impostors wrongfully usurping this beautiful title. The good shepherd, He says, continuing the allegory, loves His sheep more than himself. He lovingly protects and provides for them, without heeding fatigue, hardship or danger; for them he is ready to sacrifice even his life.

On the other hand how does the hireling conduct himself, namely the one taking care of sheep not his own, and doing this work, not through love of the sheep, but simply for the sake of the wages he receives from the master? He pays no heed to the safety of the flock entrusted to him, but is only anxious to avoid the slightest danger. When he sees the wolf coming he immediately abandons the flock, leaving the poor sheep to the tender mercies of the wolf.

Our Lord could therefore truthfully assert: I am the good shepherd because I came down from heaven in order to gather together my sheep that had gone astray. I am the good shepherd because I have sought and guarded them with infinite care and hardship. I am the good shepherd because I have led them to the salutary pastures of my heavenly doctrine. I am the good shepherd because I have generously sacrificed my life in order to rescue them from the claws of the infernal wolf. And real shepherds of Christ's fold are all those who are imbued with His spirit, who sacrifice themselves in administering to the spiritual and corporal needs of their fellowmen. So many priests, ignored and despised by the world, labor with unremitting zeal to gain souls for Christ in the exercise of their ministry. At one time they are engaged in preaching the word of God; at another, in visiting the sick, administering the last sacraments to the dying, exhorting the stray sheep to return to the fold and be reconciled with the Divine Shepherd, consoling the afflicted. True shep-

herds are those who carry the light of the gospel into the midst of barbarous nations, and those who spend their lives in benevolent institutions established to alleviate the misery and afflictions of suffering humanity. True shepherds are those virgins who bury themselves in hospitals and asylums of misfortune, without expecting other recompense beyond the one promised by Heaven.

Hirelings, on the contrary, are all those who pretend great solicitude for the good of the people. But because animated by the worldly spirit called philanthropy, and not by the spirit of Christ which is charity, they deceive the poor people with beautiful promises, while they foster their own selfish interests. Or, if you wish, they look after the material good of the people, and neglect their more essential needs which are those of the soul, allowing them to become brutalized in corruption and infidelity, if they do not positively endeavor to plunge them into this abyss. They distribute officially alms to the poor, meanwhile living extravagantly at the latter's expense and diminishing their assistance. If occasionally they happen to render any real help, it is publicly proclaimed by the press from one end of the country to the other in order to satisfy their vanity.

It was reserved for our generation to invent the art of helping the unfortunate by means of theatricals, dances and festivals, which means practically to enjoy one's self and be merry in the midst of public calamities. Usually such friends of the people, such philanthropists are incapable of making the slightest sacrifice. They take refuge in cowardly flight in the presence of danger, leaving the people to perish, provided they can save themselves. They are hirelings, not shepherds. A characteristic of the true shepherd is to seek the good of the flock even at the risk of his own life; while it is a mark of the hireling always to seek his own advantage even at the cost of the sheep which he is ready to sacrifice in order to satiate his abject egotism.

Our Lord continues His discourse, saying that He knows His sheep, namely, all the faithful belonging to the mystic fold of His Church. He always has them under His protection, and carries them in His heart, because they are dear to Him and He loves them with an infinite love. Likewise the true sheep know their loving shepherd and would recognize Him among a thousand. They reciprocate His affection and respond to His care with docility. In fact this union of love, this link of charity binding the faithful to their Supreme Pastor is just as intimate and close as the union existing between Him and His heavenly Father. "As the Father knoweth me and I know the Father."

If we be really sheep of the Divine Shepherd, we should feel this tender sentiment in our hearts. But if this fire be languid and almost extinguished, what can we say of ourselves? Oh, let us try to have our hearts inflamed always with love of Him Who has loved us more than Himself. Let us endeavor zealously to preserve this happy union with our Divine Shepherd, and rather than that sin should separate us from Him, rather than that we should become stray sheep, let us be ready to sacrifice all, even life itself. What is life when compared to the inestimable benefit of faith which gives us the right of becoming one day partakers of God's kingdom and of enjoying Him throughout eternity?

We must not forget that we were once stray sheep not belonging to His flock, and of whom He said: "Them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

We, or at least our forebears, were enveloped in the darkness of paganism, and hence had no right to enjoy the fruits of redemption which seemed to be the exclusive inheritance of the chosen people. But from that very moment the Son of God thought of us and interested Himself in our behalf, preparing for us our happy destiny! From that moment He conceived the great design of

destroying the wall of division separating the Gentiles from the Jewish nation, and without any distinction of Hebrew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian, He lovingly opened His arms to the whole posterity of Adam, in order to receive them into His mystic fold, the Catholic Church, under the direction of one shepherd, the Sovereign Pontiff, His Vicar and representative upon earth.

Let us not forget how much this benefit cost our Divine Redeemer.

In the words of St. Peter, remember that He wished to carry on His own Body the punishment of our sins. Although holy, innocent, separated from sinners and more exalted than the heavens, He wished to die upon the cross, in order that " we being dead to sin, should live to justice." Remember that we were once stray sheep outside the path of salvation, but now most fortunately we live in peace under this supreme pastor who will protect us against every designing enemy and lead us to salvation. " For you were as sheep going astray, but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls." (I Peter, ii, 25.)

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Before leaving His beloved disciples and commencing His sorrowful passion, our Savior held a long discourse in which He announced to His Apostles, and through them to all His faithful followers, the respective destiny reserved in this life for the lovers of the world and the disciples of the cross. The latter have sorrow and weeping for their inheritance, while the former will be filled with gladness. "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice." Nevertheless the Lord exhorted them not to worry, for the tribulation of good Christians will be very brief, and will soon be changed into ineffable, infinite joy, a joy that no man will be able to take from them. The pleasure of the worldly, however, will soon terminate and be followed by endless misery. These words, these promises of our Divine Redeemer, are for us Christians our greatest consolation in the midst of the afflictions of this land of exile, this valley of tears, and far from alarming us, are a source of legitimate pride and glory. "I shall willingly glory in my infirmities." If then you belong to the class of the unfortunates, do not repine but rather rejoice, because it is an evident sign that you belong to the Lord. Meanwhile seek your true consolation in meditating upon His holy word.

I

"A little while," said our Lord, "and you shall not see me, and again a little while and you shall see me because I go to the Father." For still a little while the Apostles should see Christ, because the day after He would be dead and buried. But brief indeed would be this separation

because after three days He would rise from the tomb and His Apostles would again see Him. Nevertheless after the lapse of forty days He would disappear from their sight in order to return to the Father. This is the way our Lord occasionally does with Christians. He withdraws and seems to leave us a prey to the tribulations of life. But do not believe for a moment that He has abandoned you. Even to think it, and much worse, to believe it would be a grievous offense against Divine Providence. The Lord never abandons, He cannot abandon the faithful Christian. But He may for a while conceal Himself in order to try our virtue and afford us an opportunity to acquire merit by exercising patience in tribulation. The Lord will soon convince the afflicted soul that the probation which seemed eternal will vanish as if by magic, and it will again enjoy peace. Even if afflicted during the whole course of life, remember that our earthly existence is like lightning that flashes for a moment and disappears. It is like a shadow which immediately vanishes before the rays of the sun. It is a plant, a flower that buds forth and flourishes in the morning, but at the approach of evening it withers and is fit only to feed the flames. It is like the wave of a rapid torrent flowing with velocity to be lost in the immensity of the ocean. Life passes like lightning and with it all its accompanying changes, the sorrows as well as the joys, the prosperity and the misfortune.

To-day you are perhaps afflicted, while your neighbor is in the midst of happiness. But the evening soon arrives for both, and your sorrow and his joy terminate. You no longer experience the sorrow of yesterday, while the joyful man no longer feels the happiness of the day that is past. Let us not then attach too much importance to that which is ever changing, to that which soon ends. Let us raise ourselves above all human vicissitudes. Let us not lose sight of the destiny we all must reach when enjoyment and suffering will become eternal.

II

Thus far our Savior teaches us that we need not be alarmed at earthly tribulations because they soon end. Follow His discourse and He will persuade you that you should rather love them. "The world shall rejoice," He said, "and you shall be made sorrowful." To the world's adherents are promised prosperity and contentment; to the followers of Christ, crosses and tribulations. Do you wish to be followers of the world or of Christ? Of Christ, you will certainly answer. Then you must love tribulations and glory in them, for they characterize you as His disciples. If you really have faith, continued happiness should fill you with fear, since it is a characteristic of the reprobate. The truth of our Lord's promise cannot be denied, for experience teaches that the wicked are usually happy in the present life. They are happy because they satisfy all their passions, and they seek the enjoyment of all pleasures. They are happy because fortune seems always to smile upon them. They are overloaded with prosperity and enjoy the prestige of human greatness.

True Christians are usually the most miserable and afflicted. "You shall be made sorrowful." True Christians must continually restrain their appetites, oppose their corrupt nature and deny themselves. This state of continual violence, this hard and difficult struggle which lasts during life, is in itself a great tribulation. True Christians are the most afflicted persons, because it is noticeable that sickness and sudden death, domestic misfortunes and all kinds of evil are their inheritance. Poverty is their usual condition. To be humiliated, despised and ignored is their usual destiny upon earth. Good Christians suffer because they are hated and persecuted by the world. Their merits are ignored, their virtues misinterpreted. Do you not see the hatred of the world at the present day against the true followers of Christ? They are regarded

as the vilest of creatures, unworthy of legal protection and should be banished from human society. Observe how the nuns and religious communities were exiled from France, Portugal and Mexico. They are kept away from public, civic honors, and socially ostracized. "You shall be made sorrowful." This apparent disorder is an admirable design of Divine Providence. Nearly twenty centuries ago Christ defined the characteristic marks of His true followers. It is too late now for us to change them, and it is necessary that we conform to them. He who seeks enjoyment, let him follow the world, pursue the path of iniquity and the dictates of his sensual appetites like the beasts of the field. But who wishes to follow Jesus Christ, let him be ready to suffer with Christ. Let him take up his cross and be resigned in all things to the decrees of Divine Providence.

We must not, however, forget the other words added by our Divine Redeemer, words full of consolation. "Your sorrow," He says, "shall be turned into joy."

The tribulations then of the Christian are the true source of future happiness, just as the fatigue and labor of the farmer in ploughing and sowing his field are the harbinger of the joy he will experience at the time of the harvest. Those who sow in tears shall reap in happiness. The tribulations of the Christian shall be turned into joy. Just as the mother when she is in labor hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. Thus shall it be with the Christian. Some day he will no longer remember the anguish and hardship experienced in the world because he shall be filled with the joy of heaven. The fallacious happiness of the worldly shall suddenly cease and vanish like a shadow at the approach of light. Not only shall it disappear, but it shall be changed into endless misery.

When the impious shall pass from the delights, honors, and pleasures of the world to never ending torments, he

will become so unhappy as to regard it as the greatest fortune could he only be numbered among those who in this earthly life were considered the most miserable. This awful transition will be made by the wicked who at present prosper, as it was made by those who preceded them in the path of iniquity, and which, God forbid, will be made also by you, if you prefer now to enjoy with the world, instead of suffering voluntarily with Christ. Do not then allow yourselves to be deceived by the alluring charms of a false happiness. Always remember that our happiness is not to be found in the present life, but awaits us in the next. Do not permit yourselves to be frightened by privations and hardships, remembering that this earth is our exile, that heaven is our true country. Let the worldlings prepare for their eternal misery through brief enjoyment. But we, following the dictates of true wisdom, let us prepare for eternal happiness through brief suffering.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

In that sublime discourse which our Savior held at the last Supper with His beloved disciples, He tells them of His approaching return to the Father, and complains of the little interest they manifest to learn where He is going. After promising to send them the Paraclete immediately, He briefly explains the latter's mission which would be to combat the malice of the world and to announce to the Apostles many other truths which they could not then understand owing to their dullness of comprehension.

From the entire context of this discourse there gleams the lively interest which a devoted father has for his children in the last moments of his life. It seems like a testament of affection. They are the last remembrances which our Divine Redeemer before His death leaves to His Apostles and through them to all men. We ought to receive them reverently and meditate upon them with the greatest zeal. Since it would be utterly impossible to develop in one short sermon all the truths contained in the divine word, we shall restrict our attention to some point of greater importance and strengthen our soul which is anxious for truth which really forms its nourishment.

I

"I go to Him that sent me." In other words, I leave the world in order to return to Heaven whence I came; I leave my brethren to return to my heavenly Father. Our Lord makes this announcement to His beloved disciples without being asked, realizing that it would be disagreeable and unpleasant news for them, because He knew that they had absolute need of Him. If our Lord had paid attention to the delicate sensitiveness of man and did not

wish to annoy him, He would have remained silent and concealed the truth. Man was reposing tranquilly in the midst of his false beliefs, under the spell of his flattered passions, and was annoyed by the light that came to disturb his slumber. Unfortunate indeed would we be, had our Savior followed the dictates of a false compassion, had He sought, not what would help, but what might please us! In that case He would not have been our Savior, the healer of our infirmities. We would have remained slaves of the demon, children of wrath, vessels of ignominy and perdition.

Jesus Christ came, on the contrary, into this world to disturb the fatal peace of sinners, to awaken them from their mortal lethargy, to employ if necessary the most drastic measures, as every good physician should do who has at heart the recovery of his patient. This is precisely our duty as ministers of souls. We must always tell you the truth even if you do not ask it, even when you show an unwillingness to hear it, and we know that it will be to you a source of annoyance. The Lord has imposed this obligation upon us, and we are bound to fulfil it faithfully, otherwise we would be traitors to our holy ministry. How many do not know the truths of our holy religion, who are ignorant of the laws of God, of the Church, and the duties of their respective state in life! Should we then neglect to instruct you in things of so great importance, even though you do not ask us? How many show a distaste for the word of God, and wish that the priest would never preach to the people! Should we therefore humor their caprice and neglect the most important part of our office? How many wish that the sermon would be preached according to their fancy, that it might consist in always announcing the sweet, consoling truths? They go away disgusted, if the preacher dares to touch the loathsome wounds of their vices, to remind them of the grave duties they owe to God, or to speak of the severe chastisements in store for the transgressors of His holy law!

Hence in order not to make sorrowful or embarrass these false believers, shall we avoid manifesting to them the truth which although severe is alone capable of exciting them to repentance, and of saving them? If you are blasphemers, if you curse and swear, shall we not tell you frankly that cursing and swearing is a diabolical vice that will bring down upon you the anger of God? If you are slaves of impurity and intemperance, shall we not intimate the folly of your dissolute life, and recall to your minds the sentence of St. Paul that "drunkards and adulterers shall not possess the kingdom of heaven"? If you are dishonest and have taken unjustly your neighbor's goods, shall we not remind you of the obligation of restitution? If you have lacerated the reputation of your fellowman by calumny, slander, and detraction, shall we not cry out to you: Repair the injury committed, otherwise you shall be lost? If you nourish hatred in your heart and wish to be revenged, must we not admonish you to forgive, if you wish to be forgiven? If you live in the proximate occasion of sin, can we dissimulate the grave admonition of our Divine Redeemer: "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee"? If, in a word, you are sinners and persist in living in your sin, away from Mass and the sacraments, foolishly expecting to atone for your religious neglect and indifference by a death-bed repentance, do you not want us to reprove you for your blindness and inform you that your perdition is almost certain? Do you not want us to repeat for your benefit that awful menace of Jesus Christ: "You shall seek me, you shall not find me, but you shall die in your sin"?

These are plain, blunt truths which disgust sinners. We cannot, however, keep them concealed, because they alone are able to liberate you from eternal perdition.

II

In order to mitigate the sorrow which the announcement of His approaching departure occasioned His Apostles,

our Lord made them the consoling promise that He would send from heaven the Spirit to comfort them. That is the way our Savior acts with us. To-day grief, to-morrow joy. We priests endeavor to act in a similar manner. If we render you sorrowful by the announcement of some severe truth, we do not neglect to console you with the promise of a future good. We promise that if you really wish to be converted and abandon sin, you will experience that peace of heart, that inner satisfaction which you have never found in the gratification of your brutal passions. We promise you the grace of God which is infinitely more valuable than all the treasures of the world. We promise you that the Holy Spirit shall descend upon you, filling you with His heavenly virtue. We promise you that you shall possess and enjoy God throughout eternity. And the fact always corresponds to the promise. Penance is in itself a grief. But the grief is succeeded by joy that cannot be described. He who has had the happy experience will corroborate the truth of this assertion. Make the experiment and you will realize that happiness.

In the beginning I hinted at the mission of the Paraclete upon earth. He came on a mission of justice, of mercy and love. He was to confound the incredulous world which refused to recognize the Son of God. He was to condemn the iniquitous world which inflicted the punishment of crucifixion upon innocence itself. He was to reprove the ignorant world that looked upon the doctrine of the cross as a scandal and folly. On the other hand He descended from heaven, to enlighten by His divine light the minds of the Apostles, to inflame their hearts with the holy fire of His charity. In other words the Spirit of God combats the world and renders powerful assistance to the Church. We must not think that the Divine Paraclete accomplished these beneficent results but once; it is a work continuing throughout the ages. Also at the present day He assists and comforts the Church in which He abides. Also at the present day the Holy Spirit condemns

the world that wages war against Christ, its Redeemer, and refuses to recognize and acknowledge Him as God. Also at the present day the Holy Spirit condemns the world that persecutes the priesthood. Though it may not subject the clergy to the physical tortures of ancient paganism, yet it lacerates their souls by slander and calumny, confiscates their property, drives them into exile, makes them an object of contempt in the sight of a deluded public. Also to-day the Holy Spirit condemns the world which, in its stupid pride, rejects as folly the doctrine of Christ.

Also at the present day the Holy Spirit comforts the Church, enlightens it so that it may not wander from the path of truth. That she may ever teach the truth to all nations He renders her impervious to all the attacks of earthly and infernal powers sworn to injure her. From persecutions she always emerges more beautiful and flourishing.

In a word, He preserves for her that double glory never possessed by any human society, namely, of being infallible and indefectible. How good our Divine Lord is to us! The world hates Him, because it does not know Him. And we who boast of knowing Him, shall we not love Him? At least through gratitude we should love Him. If we really love Him, we must hearken to His voice, even when it sounds severe. For we are certain that He makes us sorrowful only to console us and to bestow upon us His choicest blessings.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Next Thursday, the Feast of the Ascension — a holiday of obligation, will be the anniversary recalling to our minds the moment when the earth was deprived of our Savior's visible presence. To-day's Gospel contains the last words He uttered shortly before His departure. Observe the similarity between His last and first public utterance. When at the end of thirty years spent in seclusion He began His public mission and delivered His first sermon on the mount, the subject of it was prayer. He went up into the mountain and taught them to pray, saying: "Thus shall you pray," and He recited the Our Father. In this morning's gospel we come to His last utterance before He ascended into Heaven, and the subject of it is also prayer. Notice with what earnestness He exhorts His Apostles to pray. To His desire is united the intention of Holy Mother Church which on this Sunday, immediately preceding the three Rogation Days, causes the present Gospel to be read. She wishes to animate us with confidence and incite us to raise our minds and hearts frequently to our Heavenly Father in order to obtain the helps and graces required for our many needs. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week are universally observed throughout Christendom as days of solemn supplication. They are called Rogation Days, because the litany of the Saints is chanted in the procession which takes place especially in Catholic countries on each of these three days. Rogation or *rogatio* is the Latin equivalent for the Greek word litany.

Priests bound to the daily recitation of the Divine Office or Breviary are also obliged to recite the litany on

each of these days, if they do not chant or recite it publicly in the procession.

To-day's Gospel is an exhortation to prayer. "Ask and you shall receive." What confidence these words should diffuse in our souls! A sensitive person is sometimes prevented from seeking help in his necessities through fear of being repulsed, through the shame of being regarded an annoyance. But the Christian cannot entertain such fears, because God Himself assures us that He is delighted to receive the prayers of man. Beholding then the importance that our Lord and His Church attach to prayer, it will certainly be profitable for us to dwell for a few moments on this salutary subject.

I

Prayer is the first precept and last injunction of our Divine Redeemer. The absolute necessity of beseeching God arises from the intimate relation of prayer with divine grace. Without grace no man can be saved. "By the grace of God," says St. Paul, "I am what I am." Of myself alone I am nothing. The whole question then of eternal salvation depends upon God's grace. He who has it and cooperates with it, shall be saved. He who having it not, seeks and finds it, shall likewise obtain salvation. But he who is without it and expires in that deplorable condition, shall be lost and lost forever.

To the grace thus required for salvation, our Lord has attached one essential, indispensable condition, viz. prayer. "Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find." Knock at the door of the treasury of divine grace and it shall be opened to you.

The man who prays not for grace, shall not obtain it. When some of the primitive Christians complained of the violence of their passions, of the weakness of their will to overcome temptation, St. Paul told them that all these things should be attributed to the absence of grace

through neglect of prayer. "Therefore you have not received it, because you have not asked it."

How many neglect to say their penance! How can such people be really sorry for having offended God? How can they claim sincerity in their purpose of amendment! Is it not presumptuous to hope for victory over future temptations while neglecting the penitential prayers enjoined in confession, especially since that penance constitutes satisfaction — an integral part of the sacrament?

Without grace there is no salvation. And since without prayer, no grace. Therefore without prayer there is no salvation. Although God imparts certain graces without being asked, such as the first moving graces of faith and that of prayer itself, He bestows other indispensable graces only to those who humbly seek them. Prayer is necessary for all who have come to the use of reason.

Even had Almighty God never united the giving of His grace with the condition of prayer, it would still be necessary by reason of our Savior's precept. Where do we find a command of our Lord more frequently or more emphatically expressed in the Bible than that of prayer? Over and over again He repeats: "Watch ye and pray that you enter not into temptation. In this as well as in other precepts He began by giving us a most edifying example. He spent the most of His nights in silent prayer and meditation from which He arose as we would arise from slumber, renewed and refreshed to continue the work of man's redemption.

True, He exhorts us to pray always. But this command does not signify that we should be engaged in prayer constantly without intermission. Like the precept obliging us always to go to church does not imply that we must spend night and day before the altar to the neglect of other important duties. The precept simply means frequent prayer and nothing more. There are indeed certain occasions when we are especially bound to pray, as for example, on Sundays and holydays, every

morning and night, in all dangers, temptations, and afflictions. Consider furthermore the excellence of prayer. It is the lifting up of our minds and hearts to God to adore Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to ask His forgiveness and to beg of Him all the graces we need whether for soul or body. According to St. Augustine, it is an interview that the King of heaven and earth deigns to grant each individual. To enjoy a private audience with the Divine Majesty, you are not required to appear in court apparel. The garment He desires us to wear is the robe of innocence, or the sackcloth of humiliation. The ornaments most precious in His sight are the jewels of faith, humility, and devotion. What greater privilege can a subject have than the right of entry at all times into the presence of his sovereign? Is there any honor that a president, king, or monarch could bestow upon the people higher than the privilege of approaching him every moment of the day and night, commanding his attention, and communicating with him freely? And this is the favor our Lord bestowed upon us when He commanded us to pray.

"Hitherto," He said, "you have not asked anything in my name. While He uttered that word — *hitherto,* His thoughts no doubt wandered back over the dreary past of 4000 years, when man invoked the Almighty as the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob. Before His advent they could not appeal to God as their immediate Father through the adoption by which we have been made His sons in Christ. Many appellations did they apply to the Creator, but the magic and omnipotent name of the Man-God Jesus Christ was not yet upon their lips. Many pleas did they lay before His throne of mercy, the faith of the Patriarchs, the devotion of Israel, the meekness of Daniel and Moses, but the transcendant grace-creating merits of the Word made flesh were not yet theirs. Neither had they hitherto been able to ask in His name. This is indeed our privilege as Christians.

"Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you." How could it be otherwise when our petitions come clothed in the merits and adorned with the name of His only begotten Son?

II

This promise however does not extend to things detrimental to our spiritual welfare. Such petitions could not be asked in the name of Christ, and it would be incompatible with Divine Providence to grant what would prove hurtful to our souls. Such petitions therefore God refuses, just as our Lord refused the mother of the two sons of Zebedee, replying to her: "You know not what you ask."

May we not then have recourse to God in our temporal needs? We certainly can. The blind man of Jericho asked for the restoration of his sight. "Lord, that I may see." The leper begged to be cleansed of his loathsome disease. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The centurion asked for the cure of his sick servant. The Blessed Virgin herself pleaded with Him to provide for the scarcity of wine at the marriage feast of Cana. These were all temporal blessings which our Lord willingly granted. We also then can have recourse to Him in our temporal needs, but we should do so without too much solicitude and with perfect conformity to His divine will. He frequently denies the specified object of our prayers, but grants something equivalent or even better than that for which we seek. Just as a prudent father withholds from his children a dangerous toy and gives them instead something harmless or useful, so our Heavenly Father bestows what to Him seems best and advantageous. In praying then we should always give the preference to things of greater importance. We should place spiritual before temporal blessings. We should think first of the soul, then of the body, since the soul is of infinitely greater value. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and

His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." The prayers most recommended to us, says the catechism, are the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, the Confiteor, the acts of Faith, Hope, Love, and Contrition. And here let me warn against certain prayers circulated by irresponsible individuals for the purpose of deception and filthy lucre. One is called a letter of Jesus Christ, and supposedly found in His sepulchre. Another is a prayer to St. Joseph and frequently sent through the mail, with the injunction to pass it along to your neighbors. These prayers promise the most wonderful advantages to those reciting them, and threaten the most horrible chastisements to those ignoring them. If these prayers were genuine, Holy Mother Church would surely know of them and recommend them to her children. Persons encouraging such pious frauds are usually impostors. Instead of increasing devotion, they bring ridicule and contempt upon religion.

If our petitions are not granted, it is either because we pray with some lingering attachment to sin, or without attention and devotion, or because our supplications are lacking in confidence and humility.

Prayer should be made with devotion and attention such as would discourage wilful distractions. If we ourselves pay no attention to what we say, how can we expect God to heed our prayers? How many content themselves with a hurried prayer in the morning, and perhaps a still more hurried one at night, scarcely thinking of what they say! "These people call upon me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." "Before prayer," says Ecclesiasticus, "prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God."

Our petitions should be made with confidence. "Nothing wavering," says St. James, "for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea which is moved and carried about by the wind." "All things whatsoever you ask, when you pray," says our Lord, "believe that you shall receive and

they shall come unto you." Distrust or diffidence dishonors God, confidence honors His infinite goodness and fidelity in keeping His promises.

Lastly our prayers should be recited with humility. For it is written: "God resisteth the proud and giveth His grace to the humble." Recall to mind the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. It is also written that "the prayer of him who humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds." If our prayers are made to God with these conditions and in the name of His most adorable Son, we may rest assured that they will be favorably heard.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE ASCENSION

In order to console His Apostles who were grieving at the thought of His departure, our Lord promised to send them the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth. Immediately after His Ascension the Apostles returned to Jerusalem where they remained in prayer and recollection until the Holy Spirit descended upon them. Do you really wish to receive the Holy Ghost? If so, then like the Apostles you must prepare yourselves. Two dispositions are required, the one negative, the other positive. The negative disposition consists in the removal of sin from the soul, while the positive disposition requires the practice of Christian virtues. When our Lord was baptized by St. John in the Jordan, the Holy Ghost descended upon Him in the form of a dove. When the Apostles were assembled together in the Cenacle fifty days after our Lord's resurrection the same Holy Spirit came down upon them in the form of fiery tongues. Both the dove and the fire aptly symbolize the twofold disposition required of us in order that we may worthily receive the Holy Ghost. The dove typifies the negative disposition, while the fire represents the positive requirement.

I

When the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove, it might be asked whether He really assumed the nature of that bird, and when coming down upon the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues, whether He took the nature of fire. In other words did the nature of dove and the ele-

ment of fire become inseparably united to His adorable Person just as human nature became united to the Eternal Word at the time of His Incarnation? No, replies St. Augustin, neither nature of dove nor of fire was united to the Holy Ghost. Although real figures formed very likely in the air through the ministry of the angels, they were not permanent. The dove under the form of which the Holy Spirit appeared, demands of us a negative disposition, namely, the absence of sin. "Who will give me the wings of a dove," exclaims the royal prophet, "and I will fly and be at rest?" (Ps. liv, 7.) The dove is a symbol of innocence. In recommending to the Apostles and to us the evangelical and virtuous simplicity, our Lord proposes the example of the dove. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves." (Matt. x, 16.)

The dove in fact is a bird that abhors all uncleanliness, all filth and dirt. Never will you find doves hovering about garbage piles, carcasses, swamps or sewers. They prefer to fly high up in the air where the atmosphere is pure. Look at the dove which Noah sent out from the ark. After flying about for a considerable time, and perceiving nothing beneath it but the fetid waters of the deluge and floating corpses, finding nowhere to rest its foot without becoming soiled, it speedily returned to the ark. Just as the dove of Noah did after the deluge, so Almighty God declares that He will do in regard to the carnal man. "My spirit shall not remain in man forever, because he is carnal." (Gen. vi, 3.) Whosoever has his heart filled with corruption, soiled with the filth of sin, need not expect to receive the Holy Ghost. The carnal man is an abomination in the sight of God.

Supposing the Holy Spirit of God should again assume the form of a dove and come down upon earth, where would He arrest His flight? Here in this great metropolis? Hardly. The obscene words, filthy expressions, maledictions, blasphemies, and scandals would drive Him

away. But could He not stop in our houses? No, because in many of them there dwells the demon of discord. In many of them there is continual warfare between husband and wife, wrangling between father and son, hatred between brother and sister, enmity between relatives. In one home curses and imprecations may be heard from morning till night; in another, scandalous conversation; in a third, the head of the family is periodically drunk. Could He not perhaps go to our marts of trade and commerce? No, because the lies, frauds, cheating and commercial trickery would soon drive Him away. But at least in the Church He would find repose. I fear that even from there He would sometimes be obliged to withdraw, in order not to witness the wilful distractions, the unnecessary talk and sacrilegious profanation of God's temple. Is there no place then here upon earth where the Spirit of God might descend? Of course there is, but where?

Let us go back to the dove of Noah. When it was sent out a second time from the ark, it found an olive tree on which it alighted. Seizing a tiny branch in its beak, it returned to the ark. The olive branch is a symbol of peace. Consequently the dove of God's Holy Spirit will descend into the hearts of those who are at peace with their Creator by means of a sincere repentance; in the hearts of those who are at peace with their neighbor, living united with him in the bonds of fraternal love. The oil produced from the olive is a symbol of compassion and mercy. The Holy Spirit will joyfully make His abode in those whose hearts are filled with compassion and mercy for the afflicted, for those in want and trouble.

II

The second disposition necessary to receive the Holy Ghost is positive and consists in the practice of Christian virtues. St. Thomas teaches that the Holy Spirit assumed the form of fire to signify the wonderful effects which

He produces in our souls, provided He finds in them the requisite dispositions. Fire gives light, and the Holy Spirit Who is called light, enlightens our minds by dispelling from them the darkness of ignorance. Fire consumes, and He consumes our vices and sinful habits. "Our God is a consuming fire," says St. Paul. (Heb. xii.) Fire inflames, and He inflames our hearts with His holy love.

Unfortunately the majority of Christians oppose this heavenly fire, just like the obdurate Jews when leaving Egypt. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush in order to show him that His love had been enkindled to free them from the tyrannical yoke of Pharaoh. He made them a pillar of fire to lead them into the promised land. And that stiff-necked, ungrateful people remained always indifferent to these manifestations of love. But why recall the ungrateful conduct of the Jews? Let us consider ourselves. Jesus Christ declares that He came down from heaven to enkindle this divine love in our hearts. "I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?" (Luke xii, 49.)

Notwithstanding His affectionate desire and express will, human indifference frustrates this divine flame. The hardest rocks do not resist material fire which can pulverize them just as it can liquefy the hardest metal. Ashes alone can resist its power by smothering its flame and extinguishing its heat. The ashes afford us a striking symbol of human ingratitude. Man unmindful of Divine Goodness directs his affections to creatures instead of to the Creator. "For his heart is ashes, and his hope vain earth, and his heart more base than clay. For as much as he knew not his Maker that breathed into him a living soul." (Wis. xv.) The ashes of our ingratitude resist the fire of the Holy Spirit when we close our eyes to His heavenly light, when we turn a deaf ear to His voice and inspirations, when we smother the qualms of conscience that awakens us to repentance and salva-

tion. Then it is that we deserve the reproof which St. Stephen gave to the obstinate Jews: "You always resist the Holy Ghost." (Acts vii.) That this fatal resistance may not take root in us, we should prepare our hearts so that in them may be enkindled the love of the Holy Spirit.

If you ask how this may be accomplished, let me recall the example of Elias. When he wished to confound the false prophets of Baal and make known to the people that the God of Israel was the only true God, he fervently prayed that fire might descend from heaven to consume his holocaust. Selecting twelve stones typifying the tribes of Israel, he formed of them an altar. Upon it he arranged the wood and parts of the victim to be immolated. After sprinkling the altar, wood and victim three times most abundantly with water, he invoked the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and instantly there descended from heaven a fire that consumed not only victim and wood, but also the very stones composing the altar.

There is the rule for you to follow. If you wish the vivifying flame of the Holy Spirit to descend into your hearts, you must erect an altar of mystical stones. These are abstinence, fasting, mortification of the senses, spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Having erected the altar you should arrange upon it the wood by which is implied spiritual reading, alms to the poor, and voluntary acts of penance. Upon these must be placed the victim. No victim or sacrifice is more pleasing in the sight of God than an humbled and contrite heart, a heart filled with sorrow for past offences. "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps. li, 17.)

Over this victim of a contrite heart you must pour abundant water of tears, after the example of St. Peter who, although certain of pardon, wept bitterly for having denied his Master, after the example of St. Thomas who

undoubtedly wept over his incredulity, after the example of all the Apostles who shed tears at the recollection of their cowardly flight and shameful abandonment of their Divine Master.

Finally, just as the prayer of Elias obtained the marvellous descent of the heavenly fire consuming his holocaust, so our supplications will move the heart of God to send His Holy Spirit into our souls to purge us of every fault and earthly attachment, and to enkindle the fire of His charity. Thus it happened to the Apostles and pious women gathered together with the Blessed Virgin in the Cenacle on Pentecost. They all persevered in prayer, anxiously awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus with His brethren." (Acts 1.) Happy indeed shall we be, if the Holy Ghost finds in us these salutary dispositions. He will enter our souls, making there His abode.

With His seven gifts, with His heavenly light He will dispel the darkness of our minds, making us see clearly the vanity of earthly things, the grandeur and importance of things celestial. He will render luminous and convincing the testimony of the divinity, doctrine, and faith of Jesus Christ. Thus enlightened in mind and strengthened in will, we shall, after the example of the Apostles, give proof and testimony of our loyalty and gratitude by the integrity of our faith, by the observance of His law, by the edifying example of our conduct, and by the exercise of Christian virtues until we finally reach Heaven where He reigns with the Father and Holy Spirit throughout eternity.

FEAST OF PENTECOST

Solemn indeed and venerable is to-day's festival in the estimation of every Catholic, for it is the birthday of the Catholic Church. It is a day of common joy for all her members, because on this day the Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity descended visibly upon the Apostles, according to the Redeemer's promise. This day marks the beginning and growth of the Church of Christ, that Church which, protected and enlightened by the Spirit of wisdom and fortitude, shall last until the consummation of the world.

To-day was preached for the first time the doctrine of the cross; to-day was promulgated the new law of grace; to-day was poured upon the heads of the new believers that salutary baptismal water through which we are cleansed from original sin and made children of God. To-day was destroyed that wall of division separating the chosen people from the Gentiles, and we were all invited to enjoy the precious fruits of the divine redemption. Let us then rejoice and render glory and thanks to that Spirit Who descended also into our souls when we were regenerated in the salutary waters of Baptism, to that Spirit Who loaded us with His supernal gifts in Confirmation and Who continues to abide with us through His grace until we drive Him away through sin. That our souls may derive some spiritual advantage on this solemn occasion, let us consider the wonderful effects which the Paraclete produced upon the Apostles. Thus we shall revive a feeling of love and gratitude for Him in our hearts, and endeavor to render ourselves worthy of His supernatural gifts.

I

Before going to the Father, our Savior had more than once promised to send the Holy Ghost down upon the Apostles. He told them the motive of this mission, and even designated the place where they should assemble to receive this Divine Guest Who was coming down from heaven. "Stay you in the city, till you be endued with power from on high." (Luke, xxiv, 49.) This divine promise had its full accomplishment.

The fiftieth day after Easter all the Apostles were gathered together in the Cenacle on the declivity of Mount Sion, when suddenly was heard a noise as of a mighty wind which filled the whole house. At the same time there descended tongues of fire which rested upon the heads of those assembled. This is the simple history of the great event. The wonderful effects following it evidently prove that the Holy Ghost descended in that manner upon earth in order to transform those rough, untutored men, so that they should become the fundamental columns of His Church. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Who could describe the effects of that wonderful descent? Let us consider only the principal ones.

Before receiving the Holy Spirit the Apostles were naturally ignorant. They could not understand those sublime truths which their Divine Master had so clearly announced to them. They really had no clear conception of His Divine Person. They thought, according to popular opinion, that He would be a great conqueror Who would free Israel from the dominion of Cæsar, and render all nations of the world tributary and vassals of the chosen people. He spoke to them frequently of His passion and death. Instead of comprehending His words they were seeking to obtain the first places of honor in His kingdom. But how entirely different they appeared on the day of Pentecost! Their intellect suddenly grasped the most

sublime truths of religion, interpreted the most hidden meaning of Scripture, and discerned the most mysterious designs of Providence in the redemption of the world. They had never learned the difficult art of convincing and persuading, yet they accomplish wonders never attained by the ablest orators. They convert entire nations to the cross. Peter preaches Christ crucified in his native tongue, and people of different tribes and nations understand him as if he addressed them in their own language. He preaches, and more than five thousand persons are on one occasion converted to the faith and baptized in the name of Christ. So great in fact is their wisdom that they confound the most celebrated philosophers of Athens and Rome. Surmounting all obstacles, they succeed in planting the cross on the ruins of paganism.

The second wonderful effect which the Holy Ghost produced in the Apostles was the gift of the liveliest and most ardent faith. To their ignorance they had united incredulity. On various occasions they seemed to attach little faith to the works of their Divine Master Who was deserving of all their confidence. But wait until the power of the Paraclete descends upon them, and you will behold them transformed as if by magic into the first champions and fearless defenders of that faith. You will see them dividing the nations of the earth and moistening the same with their sweat in order to win them to Christ. They generously employed all their thoughts, affections and very lives in spreading the gospel. By this faith they perform the most astounding miracles that awaken the enthusiasm and admiration of the people. By this faith they dominate nature and conquer the power of the elements. Oh, truly divine power of the Paraclete! We must acknowledge that this wondrous change is the work of His omnipotence.

The most signal prodigy which the descent of the Holy Ghost wrought upon the Apostles was the gift of heroic fortitude. Naturally timid and cowardly, they betrayed

the greatest aversion to suffering. When they beheld their Divine Master arrested in the garden, they all shamefully took to flight, leaving Him in the hands of His enemies. Peter himself who boasted of being ready to follow Him even unto death, denies Him in presence of a maid servant. When they beheld Him risen, they were filled with fright like children, imagining that they saw a ghost. On this very day of Pentecost they locked themselves up in the Cenacle through fear of the Jews.

Observe them now and see how changed they are from the beginning. They immediately emerge from their hiding place and preach Christ crucified in the public squares of Jerusalem, completely ignoring the derisions of the populace that ascribes to drunkenness their holy enthusiasm, paying no attention to the hatred of the priests who declare them transgressors of the law and seducers of the people. They are imprisoned, ill treated, scourged, but they do not omit preaching the truth while in chains and in the midst of the most atrocious tortures. They are forbidden to preach, but they courageously reply that it is necessary to obey God rather than men. You may torment us, they exclaim, you may scourge and lacerate our flesh, you may vent your fury in our blood, but an inward power compels us to speak. We shall continue to preach as long as life lasts, for we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard. The boundaries of Judea are altogether too narrow for the ardor of their charity. Hence we behold them traversing seas, crossing mountains and deserts in order to seek new people and new nations. No obstacle impedes them, no danger affrights them. They speak the truth in presence of powerful monarchs. They are threatened and they fear not; they are tortured and they rejoice. With undaunted courage they voluntarily sacrifice all, peace, liberty, fortune, honors and even life itself in order to accomplish the divine mission entrusted to them from Heaven.

Behold the wonderful effects which the Spirit of God produced this day in His descent upon the Apostles. Why do not we experience these marvellous results? Why are we so ignorant of spiritual things, so cold and indifferent in the service of God? This is an evident sign that the Holy Spirit does not reside in our hearts, because we have banished Him by committing sin.

Let us persuade ourselves that the Spirit of God does not communicate Himself to the proud, the angry, the impure, the intemperate, the blasphemers, and to all who serve the world, the devil and the flesh, and who offend Him by their iniquity. Let us therefore cleanse our souls and prepare for Him a fitting temple. Let us detest all our sins with sincere contrition. Then He will revisit us, filling us with His graces and enriching us with the plenitude of his gifts. Our minds illumined by His divine light will know the truth, our hearts inflamed by His celestial ardor will love virtue. We shall walk with fervor and constancy along the arduous path of heaven until we reach the height of that perfection of which the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause, the primary and exclusive source.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

We read in to-day's epistle a splendid eulogy of fraternal love. It is the Apostle of charity who thus defines this beautiful virtue: God is charity, because He sent His only begotten Son upon earth to free us from sin and to give us life. He therefore who loves not his fellow man, cannot be said even to know God, and he who really loves the Lord, must of necessity love also his fellow creature.

In to-day's gospel our Savior teaches in what practical manner we must exercise this beautiful virtue, the duties it imposes, and the opposite vices against which we must carefully guard, if we wish to be true followers of a religion that has love as its characteristic.

Let us receive into our hearts these precious germs which the Word of God came to plant upon earth. They will produce in us the same results they wrought in the world which before the coming of our Lord was an arid desert. After His advent, it became a fruitful garden, rich in the most beautiful virtues.

I

Our Divine Lord selected His twelve Apostles on a picturesque hill. From there He came down to a plain which the gospel calls "a country place commanding an attractive view of Lake Genesareth, Mt. Tabor and the great Ermon whose snow-capped summit glistened in the rays of the sun. A great multitude had gathered there from all Judea, Jerusalem, and even from the maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon. Here in nature's theatre and in presence of that imposing audience did

our Lord proclaim His new doctrine. His was a doctrine diametrically opposed to the world's maxims and to the base instincts of our fallen nature, for it designated as blessed the poor, the timid, and the afflicted. His words were always like flashes of light opening up to the mind new horizons, and revealing a new world of truth, of precepts and virtues as far superior to the ancient as the distance between earth and heaven. Certainly novel must have sounded to the ear that divine precept of fraternal charity declaring all men sons of the same Father, all brethren and members of the same family, prescribing that all should be loved, that to all should mercy be shown in the same manner that our heavenly Father is merciful to us. "Be ye merciful even as your heavenly Father is merciful."

This charity, this mercy was unknown to the ancient world. The Jew in fact restricted it to the members of his race. The Gentile loved for the sake of filthy lust, of selfish interest. He felt no compassion for human misfortune. He neglected to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to console the afflicted, or to heal the sick. He regarded all the unfortunate as a class abhorred by heaven and a useless burden to society.

To know how love and mercy were exercised in the ancient world, it suffices to recall the unhappy state of woman and the miserable condition of the slave. Pagan society was divided into two camps between which there intervened an abyss which deprived them of every communication. On the one hand the oppressors, on the other the oppressed; the wealthy and the unfortunate. There was no danger of charity being exercised. Let us thank our amiable Redeemer Who filled up this abyss, Who removed this social inequality and so greatly ameliorated by His sublime precept the destiny of unfortunate humanity.

But how shall we show mercy to our fellow men? Let us listen to our Divine Master Who teaches us with

precision and clearness. He wishes us to show mercy in thought, word, and deed. First of all in thought. He forbids us to form rash judgments in our mind, to usurp the right of censuring our brethren, to pass injurious and false opinions upon their conduct. "Judge not and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned." Lest pride should make us believe that in this matter we are guided by a right motive, and that it is not passion prompting us to judge our fellow man, but the desire of correcting his faults and making him act better, behold how our Lord removes this fallacy. "Can the blind," He asks, "lead the blind? Shall not both fall into the ditch?" As if He wished to say: "Is it possible that he having no eyes to see, nor strength to correct his own faults, will be capable of correcting others?" A blind person, presuming to act as guide for another blind man, will fall into the ditch and drag the other along with him. If you be a sinner and vicious, it is not likely that by your conduct you will render another better. According to the common proverb, the scholar cannot be more perfect than his master. "Why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye, but the beam that is in thy own eye thou considered not?" How can you have the courage to blame and exaggerate the small defects discovered in others, while you do not see and neglect your own most grievous faults? Oh, hypocrite, you pretend to be actuated by zeal of charity, of justice, when on the contrary, it is the spirit of pride prompting you to make these rash judgments and censures. If you wish to proceed rightly and justly, "cast first the beam out of thine own eye, correct yourself of your grave sins, and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother's eye." When you have corrected yourself, then, and not before, can you try to correct the faults you discover in others. In the light of these solid, divine arguments what an ugly appearance the vice of rash judgment makes! Let us shun this sinful habit

which our Lord so severely reprehended in the Scribes and Pharisees. It cannot be reconciled with the mercy we are bound to exercise towards our fellow men.

In the second place our Lord requires that we practise charity in speech, forgiving injuries and generously granting pardon to offenders. "Forgive and it shall be forgiven you." This pardon should proceed from the heart, otherwise it would be a mere fiction. And as man cannot read the sentiments of the soul, the offender must hear the words of peace and pardon from our lips. Who refuses this, sins not only against charity, but also against justice. He denies to others an indulgence he has received so often from God and even from men, as our Lord evidently shows us in the parable of the unfaithful steward. In vain does the pride of the world attempt to rebel against this sublime law. In vain does our corrupt nature endeavor through cavil and sophistry to withdraw from the fulfilment of this sacred duty, or content itself with granting a vain, illusory, apparent forgiveness. The will of God in this matter could not be more energetic, resolute, and concise. If you forgive not your enemy, He says, my heavenly Father will treat you as a faithless servant, that is, He will deliver you into the hands of the ministers of His eternal vengeance. "Thus shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you do not forgive everyone your brother from your heart."

Let your forgiveness be complete and generous, in such a manner that hatred be changed into love. You must love your enemies, you must do good to those that hate you, pray for those that persecute you, calumniate you. You must treat them in fact as if they were your tenderest friends.

Mercy therefore is not confined to beautiful words, but manifests itself in deeds. "Give," continues our Divine Lord, "and it shall be given you. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again." Love is active and feels the

need of doing good in the best possible way to the person loved. Let the example of our amiable Redeemer suffice for us. He loved us with an infinite love and willingly sacrificed His life for our salvation. How, adds the Apostle, can he boast of his charity who beholding his indigent brother extend his hand thin and trembling from hunger, deny him help and drive him away with insulting words?

The world was and always will be filled with misery and sorrow. Many generous souls have sacrificed wealth, health, and life to assist their unfortunate brethren, to lighten the burden of human misfortune. In this field of charity all must labor who wish to acquire virtues rendering them worthy of an eternal recompense. Our Divine Master invites us to this important work by example as well as by teaching. In order to conquer our indolence, He assures us that all those works of mercy exercised towards our fellow men, shall be regarded as done to Himself, and that even a cup of water given to the thirsty in His Name, shall not pass unrewarded. What more can you desire?

He promises us that the incomparable reward of our charity shall be the eternal glory of heaven. On the final day of great retributions, He will place in possession of that blessed kingdom only those who will have shown mercy to their indigent brethren, those who will have clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and visited the sick.

Let us listen to the voice of Christ Who champions the cause of the poor, and we shall be, as it were, egotistic in a saintly manner by showing them mercy in order to provide for our true interest, our eternal destiny. Are we frightened at the thought of the many debts we have contracted with Divine Justice? We can easily redeem them by putting the price of them in the hands of the poor. We do not know whether our Lord has forgiven our sins, whether the Blood of the Lamb has cleansed the filth of so many iniquities with which our souls have

been sullied. But we have the means of acquiring this consoling certainty. It suffices that we show charity to our brethren. This charity will conceal under its pure mantle all our spiritual miseries and shall render us still worthy of enjoying God's friendship. "Charity covereth a multitude of sins."

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

On the feast of Corpus Christi the Church celebrated the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament established by our Lord on Holy Thursday, the vigil of His sorrowful Passion. Hence the gospel of the Sunday within the octave refers to this great mystery. It contains a parable in which our Lord depicts the generosity of God inviting all men to this heavenly banquet, and the indifference of those declining the proffered invitation. In the consideration of these two interesting points we shall see the excellence of Holy Communion and the apathy of so many Christians in refusing to receive it. This indifference is indeed lamentable. It shows us the depraved taste of the worldlings who eagerly pursue sensual pleasures and material interests. It makes us realize how few there are who value and cultivate true, solid piety. It shall be my endeavor to rouse you from this regrettable torpor. I hope that you may follow my suggestions prompted exclusively from a most ardent desire of promoting your spiritual welfare.

I

"A certain man made a great supper and invited many." In this man you readily recognize our amiable Redeemer Who prepared the Eucharistic banquet to which He invited all men without exception. Behold Him at the Last Supper. After partaking of the paschal lamb, He took bread into His adorable hands, blessed, broke, and gave it to His disciples, saying: "Take ye and eat, for this is my body." Then taking the chalice of

wine, He offered it to them, saying: "This is the chalice of my blood, drink ye all of this. Do this always in commemoration of me. I shall be with you all days unto the consummation of the world." There is the great supper which Jesus, our most loving Father was pleased to prepare for His children. Was He not right in calling that supper great? So sublime is the grandeur of this divine gift that at the very thought of it human reason is bewildered, confounded, overcome. Faith alone can contemplate the hidden wonders of this profound mystery.

The exquisiteness of a banquet is revealed in the dignity of the host and in the rare quality of the viands that are served. Faith teaches that our Lord Himself invites us to this Eucharistic banquet. Not only does He give us a most pressing invitation, but even menaces with the threat of eternal perdition those refusing to accept His generous offer. The banquet then to which we are invited is truly great, for it is question of sitting at table with a God. There are unfortunately Christians so stupidly proud that they are ashamed to receive Holy Communion. Instead of appreciating the incomparable honor conferred upon them, it seems as if they feared to degrade themselves by approaching the altar railing with ordinary people! If an earthly prince, or a distinguished personage invited you to dine with him, how elated you would feel! How then can you remain indifferent, or consider as humiliating an invitation to dine with the King of Heaven?

What kind of food does our Lord serve at His banquet? It is hardly necessary to repeat what you already know. He prepares, not a material food howsoever delicious, not a food momentarily restoring the strength of the body; but He communicates to us a food entirely spiritual and divine which gives man immortality. "He that eateth this bread shall live forever." He prepares and gives us His own Flesh and Blood, His adorable Body; that flesh and blood which He took from the im-

maculate womb of Mary; that flesh and blood which He immolated for us on Calvary; that flesh and blood now gloriously reigning in Heaven. Although our senses reveal to us only the accidents of bread and wine, Faith teaches and we firmly believe that it is truly the Body and Blood of Christ. When the priest in the holy sacrifice of the Mass pronounces the words of consecration, in that same moment the great prodigy is accomplished. The substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. The appearances or accidents, such as the color, taste, and quantity of bread and wine which alone remain, are the mystic veil concealing from us the stupendous wonder. When therefore you approach Holy Communion, you really receive the Body of Christ; this most holy Body is first placed upon your tongue. Afterwards it enters your breast which becomes in consequence a temple of the Divinity and remains there as long as the Eucharistic species last. You contract with God the most intimate union similar to that of two liquids or metals that coalesce, or still better like the nourishment we take is changed into the substance of our body. Just as the food and drink we daily consume is changed into our body and blood, so the Body and Blood received by us in Holy Communion has the power to transform us into His substance. By virtue of this ineffable change our poor, weak nature gradually corrects its imperfections, becomes clothed with the noble prerogatives adorning the Flesh itself of Christ, and lives of the life of Christ. "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me."

Could there be a greater banquet than that to which our Lord invites us? Could there be a more precious nourishment than that which He dispenses? No! exclaims St. Augustin. "God though all-wise, knew nothing better to give; though infinitely rich, He had nothing to bestow more precious; though omnipotent, He was unable to give more."

Observe moreover that Almighty God has placed neither limit nor measure to the distribution of this precious gift. It would have been an immense, an infinite privilege, if just once in the course of our entire lives, He deigned to give us His sacred Flesh as spiritual food. But it is His desire that the Eucharistic banquet be always prepared. Every day He distributes this bread of angels to all wishing to receive it. How grateful we should be for this invaluable gift which God in His infinite goodness has been pleased to bestow upon His poor creatures. With what ardor and ecstasy should we not hasten to this sacrament of love, especially when we realize that by so doing, we conform to God's holy will.

II

Unfortunately there are indeed few anxious to receive this celestial food. How many manifest a sort of nausea and indifference towards it! If it be question of undermining the health in dissipation and intemperance, or enjoying a worldly banquet, oh, then our desires take wings. Without coaxing or special invitation we hasten to where curiosity and pleasure afford an attraction. The Lord's table is usually abandoned. With the exception of a small number of devout souls, the vast majority of Christians do not approach Holy Communion. They do not in fact deem it necessary, and are content to go but once a year or on the principal feasts. So great is the sloth and indifference of modern Christians in this respect, that the Church has been obliged to compel them by special precept — a precept alas too often ignored and derided.

Holy Communion rarely received rarely produces permanent fruit, and leaves man in a state of tepidity deserving of compassion. Frequent communion is necessary in order to keep the soul in life and vigor. We need this food to repair our strength which is gradually diminishing. We require this heavenly antidote to heal the

wounds inflicted by the enemy. We need this restraint to check our passions. We need this celestial nourishment to invigorate our virtue. He who communicates rarely, falls frequently, and he falls precisely because he lacks the strength to combat and resist. The rare communicant finds himself without protection in danger, without counsel in doubt, without a shield against evil machinations. He lacks the spirit of self-sacrifice, he has not the energy to do good, much less the courage to achieve great things.

The man, on the contrary, who often renews his spiritual strength at the Eucharistic table, has a clearer idea of his duties, and discharges them more faithfully. He abhors vice and loves virtue. He is not inordinately attached to earth, nor submerged in material interests. He is anxious for heavenly things, and treats the affair of his eternal salvation with the solicitude it deserves. Allow me then to exhort you most earnestly to frequent this celestial banquet. Oh, what a melancholy sight to behold the Lord's table deserted! Conquer human respect which is really a diabolical snare preventing many from entering heaven. Cast aside sloth which really nauseates the heart of God. Perhaps my words may fall upon deaf ears, and my exhortation may remain fruitless. But in that case so much the worse for you. My conscience will not molest me for having done my duty, while you perhaps may one day repent of not having followed the counsels intended exclusively for your benefit.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hatred is an abject passion perverting the judgment and finding fault with actions most deserving of praise. We see this exemplified in the conduct of the Pharisees who tainted with this vice could discover nothing in our Savior's actions but what merited their censures. To-day's gospel shows them murmuring against Him because He preached to poor sinners and treated them with paternal kindness. They wounded Him in the most delicate sentiment of His heart, in that virtue forming His greatest delight, in that infinite charity which will constitute the wonder of all ages. He easily confounded them by narrating to them the parables of the stray sheep and the lost groat. In these two illustrations He shows His infinite love for sinners who are the most unfortunate part of humanity, and for that very reason the dearest to His heart. We shall briefly consider the two parables, commenting and enjoying their beauty, and gathering from them fruit for our spiritual advantage.

I

Whenever our Divine Master wishes to afford us a vivid image of His infinite charity towards mankind, He has recourse to His favorite and highly expressive simile of the good shepherd. What does the shepherd do who has a hundred sheep, if one happens to go astray? He immediately leaves the ninety-nine to feed in the wilderness, and anxiously goes in quest of the one that is lost. When he has found it, he places it upon his shoulders, wishing as it were to spare it the fatigue of the homeward journey. Arriving home he cannot contain the fulness of his joy and feels the need of diffusing it. Hence

he gathers together his friends and neighbors, exclaiming: Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.

With another figure He manifests to us the same truth. If a woman, He continues, has lost a precious stone, you will see her turning the house upside down, searching diligently every nook and corner until she has found it. Then she also calls together her friends and neighbors, exclaiming: Rejoice with me because I have found the groat that was lost.

Thus did our Divine Redeemer reply to His unjust critics. It was as if He had said: You, oh malignant Pharisees, cannot fathom the hidden mysteries, the profound depths of infinite goodness. In your pride you abhor these poor sinners and think that they should be banished from all human intercourse. You murmur against me because I approach them, and seek to regenerate these degraded creatures. You should know, however, that these stray sheep, these lost groats form the object of my most tender solicitude. Purposely I came down from heaven for their sake in order to seek them out and rescue them from perdition. My most ardent desire is to save these unfortunate sinners and lead them back repentant to the Fold. For them I am willing to sacrifice all, even life. "I came to call, not the just, but sinners . . . and I lay down my life for my sheep." When was such a consoling truth ever before heard in the world? In the Old Law, the law of fear and servitude, outraged Divinity caused the scourge of His tremendous justice to fall upon the guilty. Human iniquities were punished with extreme rigor and with the severest chastisements. Those offending the infinite majesty of God were often obliged to expiate their crime with their blood. Although they strove with sacrifices to placate the anger of heaven, they were never sure of having obtained forgiveness. On the face of God the sinner never beheld the reassuring smile of father, but

rather the menacing and severe expression of judge. To-day, however, with the promulgation of the New Law of grace and love what a happy transformation has spread over the earth! It seems as if God really changed His nature, or certainly modified the economy of His providence in the world's government. The sinner is no longer the target of His vengeance, but rather the object of His most tender solicitude. Almighty God does not pursue the guilty wretch to exterminate and destroy him. On the contrary, He lovingly seeks the sinner, calls and patiently waits for him, deplores his abandonment and has no peace until He has found him. Then He takes him up into His arms. Instead of chastising him as he richly merited, He overloads him with caresses and benefits. And there is great rejoicing throughout the entire heavenly court over this happy event.

It seems incredible that God should manifest so great an interest in a vile, unfaithful creature that can neither diminish nor augment His happiness. Yet who can doubt it? It is our Lord Himself Who gives us these proofs of divine love towards sinners in His parables of the stray sheep, of the lost groat, and in the joyful reception which the father tendered his prodigal son. It is our Lord Himself Who in to-day's gospel expressly declares that there shall be joy in heaven among the angels over one sinner that doth penance more than over ninety-nine just who need not penance.

But what causes the Savior to be so wonderfully merciful towards guilty man? What placates His anger and disarms His right hand already extended to punish him? What moves Him to compassion? We must seek the reason in that merciful Advocate Who became a Mediator for us with the Father. We must seek the motive in that Precious Blood continually crying out Forgiveness, in those Sacred Wounds which He deigned to carry in His Body in order to expiate our sins and merit for us the right that God should be merciful and clement.

Great therefore should be our gratitude to this loving Father Who changed our unhappy fate at the cost of so many sacrifices. Great also should be our confidence in His mercy, since He has shown the sentiments of His heart towards us, His stray sheep.

Woe to him who should dare to abuse this divine goodness; woe to him who attempts to flee from this good Shepherd, and turns a deaf ear to His voice, as did the Pharisees. Woe to him who should say: I can sin as much as I like, and will change my conduct when it pleases me. Woe to him, in a word, who becomes obstinate in his sin, saying that the mercy of God is infinite, because the vengeance of God may come unexpectedly to destroy him.

On the other hand, let us use great indulgence and charity towards sinners. It often happens that when beholding the enormous crimes perpetrated in the world and the arrogance of the wicked who seem with impunity to trample under foot every law, human and divine, our blood boils with indignation, and we feel like asking God to destroy them and free the earth of their presence. But that is not a good spirit; it is not the spirit of Jesus Christ Who is all clemency with sinners. We imitate rather those two disciples who one day asked our Lord to rain down fire from heaven upon the city that had closed its gates in their face. He reproved their indiscreet zeal, thereby teaching us that if the Christian must always hate iniquity, he is on the other hand obliged to compassionate the wayward, after the example of Him Who taught us by word and deed to treat them as our brethren. If God tolerates them, if He allows the sun to shine indiscriminately upon the sinners as well as upon the just, if He does not wish their death, but that they be converted and live, how can we justify ourselves in desiring their destruction?

Our duty therefore is to pity them, because they are of all creatures the most miserable. Our duty is to pray for

them that the Lord by the power of His grace may bring them back to the path of salvation. Our duty is to become instrumental in their conversion by all the means that charity may suggest, persuaded that their case is never hopeless, that while life lasts there is always hope, no matter how steeped they may be in iniquity.

The judgments of God are inscrutable. The examples of the Pauls, the Augustins, the Magdalens, and of countless others ought sufficiently to convince us, that when God wishes, He can change vessels of ignominy into vessels of honor. Besides, the consciousness of our own weakness and misery should persuade us, that if divine help should fail, we ourselves could at any moment tumble into an abyss far more frightful than that in which some of our fellow men are unfortunately submerged.

The disheartening spectacle of others ought therefore to awaken in our souls a sentiment of the liveliest gratitude towards Him Who mercifully keeps us on the right path of life and prevents us from falling.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The miraculous draught of fishes mentioned in to-day's gospel affords ample material for a sermon, and abundant incentive for your piety. For, if from the consideration of the fact, which is indeed most admirable, showing as it does the infinite power of the Redeemer, we proceed to investigate the moral sense it contains, we must esteem most highly the wisdom of Him Who could reveal such great and profound mysteries, so many sublime truths and most useful lessons in the very miracles He accomplished.

All the circumstances accompanying this solemn event have a mystical signification. Jesus preaching from the bark of Peter implies the prerogative granted exclusively to the Church of Rome, to the Church where resides the successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ to teach truth to the world. The Apostles who, without the presence of Jesus see all their efforts fruitless, remind us of the great truth that man, without the help of divine grace, can accomplish nothing. The miraculous draught of fishes made by the Apostles at the instance of their Divine Master, symbolizes the conquest which the Church made of the Gentiles, and their entrance into the bark of Peter, the centre of Catholic unity. Let us contemplate this marvelous fact, without losing sight of the deep mysteries it contains.

I

The gospel relates that a great multitude gathered around our Savior to hear His words of truth and wisdom. The wave of humanity kept steadily increasing, crowding and pressing about Him from all sides, so that

He could not speak conveniently under those circumstances. What was He to do in order to be seen and heard by the endless throng? Near the shore of Lake Genesareth two boats of poor fishermen lay at anchor. Going up into one of the ships that was Simon Peter's, our Savior bade him to draw back a little from the land, and from this improvised pulpit He addressed the multitude.

The ship is a symbol of the Church destined by God to carry mankind across the turbulent sea of life to the haven of eternal happiness. This mystic bark, the Church, is entrusted to Peter. He is the pilot divinely appointed to direct it. In the bark of Peter, in the Roman Catholic Church, Christ has established His infallible chair of truth. From here emanate the oracles; from here proceeds the light diffused to enlighten all the nations of the earth. Those wishing to know the truths of eternal life with certainty and to escape the deception of false teachers, let them listen to Jesus Christ Who continues to teach at the present day from the bark of Peter, from the chair of His Vicar, the Roman Pontiff. The doctrines issuing from this source cannot be contrary to truth, because our Lord prayed and continues to pray that the faith of Peter may never fail. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Adhere tenaciously to this principle, if you wish to be true followers of Christ.

Never was this fundamental truth assailed as it is at the present time. Nowadays people want to believe only what suits their individual fancy. They declaim against the Sovereign Pontiff and ridicule his infallibility. But bear well in mind that this is the sign distinguishing true from false believers: He who stands with the Roman Pontiff and hearkens obediently to his teachings is alone the true Catholic. He who despises, derides, and attacks them, is undoubtedly a heretic or an infidel. "He that heareth not the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican."

When our Lord had finished speaking to the multitude, He commanded Simon to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a draught. These words of our Divine Master admirably confirm the truth already mentioned. Also the other two fishermen, James and John the sons of Zebedee, were ordered to cast their nets. But to Peter alone He confided the office of conducting and directing the ship. By this is meant that, although our Savior authorized all His Apostles and their successors, the Bishops, to exercise ministerial powers, upon the Roman Pontiff alone did He confer the prerogative of ruling His Church. All the other pastors then must labor in the Church, instruct and sanctify souls, but to the Supreme Pastor belongs the right to regulate the organism of the whole Church, just as it pertains to the head to direct the movements and actions of all the members of the human body.

To our Lord's proposal Peter ventured to reply that they had labored the whole night and taken nothing. Poor Apostles! They had labored without Jesus Christ. They had labored by themselves. Hence their fatigue and hardship remained sterile. Oh, let us be persuaded of this great truth, that we miserable mortals are absolutely incapable of accomplishing any good, that our natural strength does not suffice, and that we have constant need of divine help. Of ourselves we could not conceive even a good thought, a generous impulse, if the merciful God did not help us beforehand with His grace. It is He who moves the will to good; it is He who gives us the courage to surmount all obstacles for its attainment.

How many labor without Jesus Christ, under the impulse of their passions and evil suggestions! The worldling labors to accumulate riches; the ambitious man undergoes fatigue to gain the esteem of his fellow men; the libertin sacrifices health, honor, and wealth to gratify his brutal appetites. But after so many hardships and suf-

having they discover that all their labors have been in vain. They foolishly expected to become the happiest and most virtuous of mortals. In the end they are compelled to acknowledge and confess with the Apostles that they have suffered and labored for so many years, and undergone so many

There are also many who labor especially for the good, but even their efforts remain fruitless because they labor without Jesus Christ. And how does this happen? Simply because they are not united with Him, for they have sin in their soul and are unwilling to abandon it. They do good, but at the same time continue to commit evil. They fulfil some religious duties, but do not fail to greatly flatter themselves. They foolishly imagine to compensate for the evil they commit by the apparent good they occasionally perform.

Such good has no merit in the sight of God, and is just the same as if it had not been done, because performed not for the love of Jesus Christ but without Him. Also many will be turned away by Him on the last day to exclaim: "Oh, unhappy me! How I realize that I have toiled and suffered without any advantage, and perhaps to my own detriment! What have you? I expect to obtain from Him abundant reward, because I sacrificed myself, without thinking beforehand of obtaining any part of it! What a treasure of merits I could have gained for heaven, had I only purchased those sufferings at a great occasion for the sake of Jesus! How many remain but the regret and remorse of having unprofitably done penitential works! We have labored the whole night and taken nothing! Let us labor then with and for Jesus Christ. Let us be ready in the hours of God's grace, and not with the vain and unprofitable. If we desire it to be meritorious.

Message, one day murmured among the Lord's disciples. They seemed to have remembered the great truth, and therefore immediately answered: "As thy word, O Lord, I will let down the net." While we were alone our

efforts were vain and useless; but now that Thou art with us, I am confident that Thou wilt give Thy benediction to our work. Nor was he wrong in his conjecture. So great was the quantity of fish taken that the net came near breaking and both boats were necessary to hold them.

With this miraculous draught of fishes our Lord wished to symbolize the multitude of new believers which the fisherman of Galilee would take into his net and place in the mystic bark of the Church. The remainder of the gospel favors and confirms this interpretation.

It tells us in fact that Peter, amazed and confused at sight of the stupendous miracle, threw himself at the feet of Jesus and exclaimed: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." And what answer did our Savior make? "Fear not," He said, "from henceforth thou shalt be a fisher of men." And immediately Peter moved by the divine grace working within his soul, left all things and followed Jesus, in order to prepare himself for the exalted ministry to which he was called.

The prodigious draught of fishes was therefore a figure of the precious conquests which the Christian Church would afterwards make in the world. At the command of his Divine Master Peter lets down his net in the sea of Galilee and draws it out overloaded with fish. Later Christ will say to Peter and the other Apostles: Going therefore, teach all nations. Preach my gospel to every creature. Cast the net of my doctrine into the great sea of humanity, and behold what a multitude of believers you shall gather into the mystic bark of my Church.

And Peter at the word of Christ applied himself energetically and faithfully to the work. The mystic draught progressed always and continues even now with the happiest results, for great is the number of infidels and unbelievers who become Christians, having been taken into the net of Peter's successor. Let me conclude by exhorting you to admire the infinite power of our Divine Redeemer Who performed this astounding prodigy more

for the instruction of future generations than for the benefit of those witnessing it. Bear always in mind the useful instructions suggested by this great event. Revere the Sovereign Pontiff as your infallible leader, the Visible Head of the Church. Labor always with and for Jesus Christ. Finally, adore His infinite mercy which without any merit on your part has deigned to receive you into the mystic boat of His Church in order to conduct you to the haven of Paradise.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The most assiduous hearers of our Divine Lord were undoubtedly the Scribes and Pharisees with whom we frequently find Him in public debate and in private conversation. Yet strange as it may seem, they profited the least of all by His heavenly doctrine. The spirit of pride which dominated them was like a brass wall preventing His inspired words from penetrating their hearts and producing in them the wondrous effects which they accomplished in the souls of the multitude better disposed. Deplorable blindness! They had the good fortune to imbibe truth, virtue at its very fountain-head, yet through their own fault they always found themselves sinking deeper in the darkness of ignorance and in the mire of corruption.

If we really wish to escape their awful chastisement, let us always listen with an humble spirit to the divine word, remembering that God is pleased to converse with the simple. With this salutary disposition let us give our undivided attention to the important instruction which our Lord furnishes in to-day's gospel.

I

The first solemn admonition which our Divine Master gives us is the following: "Amen I say to you, unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The Scribes and Pharisees were content to observe the appearances of the law, but neglected its substance. They were obsequious, scrupulous, and subtle in the in-

terpretation of the literal sense, but they made no effort to follow the spirit of the law. Yet the Apostle assures us that the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.

In order to convince us that the justice practised by the Pharisees was most imperfect and insufficient, our Lord takes as an illustration one of the many precepts of the law, namely, the one forbidding homicide. "It was said to the ancients: thou shalt not kill." If we regard solely the words announcing this commandment, it simply forbids the taking of another's life, and nothing more. Hence the Pharisees were very careful not to stain their hands with the blood of their fellow men, and for them that sufficed to be regarded as perfect observers of the divine law. At the same time they did not scruple to bring about another's death through their insidious machinations, as in the case of our Lord Whom they delivered out of envy into the hands of Pilate, so that He would be dragged to the gibbet as a malefactor.

What do you think of this Pharisaical justice? Could our Lord restrict the effects of His law within such narrow limits? No! continues the Divine Master, this false interpretation is contrary to the intention of the Supreme Legislator. "I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment," that is, he shall be deserving of death, just the same as the man committing murder merits capital punishment.

Hatred then, according to our Divine Lord, is a crime which in the divine balance has the same guilt as murder and may be defined as potential homicide. What in fact does he do who nourishes in his soul this furious passion? The angry man revels mentally in the blood of his detested brother. He ardently desires his death. He studies ways and means of gratifying his vengeance, and in imagination gloats in the contemplation of his mortal agony. If through fear, lack of strength, or other motives independent of his will, he fails to execute

the crime already committed in his heart, will he be on that account less culpable in the sight of God Who carefully measures man's guilt from the affections of his soul rather than from the external acts of his body? Is not hatred perhaps the forge in which are manufactured quarrels, brawls, frauds, calumnies, wounds, massacres, in a word, the endless series of crimes afflicting society?

If the effect be condemned and punished, why should the cause producing it remain unpunished? If the law of God forbids murder, will it not also forbid hatred, its legitimate father and direct incentive? Yes, replies St. John the Apostle: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and therefore deserving of the severest chastisement."

But let us follow attentively our Savior's course of reasoning. If it be a great sin to hate one's brother, will it be less sinful to stain his honor by applying to him injurious epithets?

No, continues our Lord, for whosoever with mortal anger in his heart shall say to his brother, *Raca* (*i.e.* a frivolous character without sense), shall be in danger of the council, namely, he shall deserve a graver punishment of death. And whosoever with a similar disposition of heart, shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire, or the fire of Gehenna. He shall merit a still more painful death, like the one suffered by the unfortunate victims in the narrow and deep valley of Gehenna located at the foot of Mount Sion. There the Hebrews had erected a bronze statue to the false god Moloch to whom they offered incense and even sacrificed their offspring which they placed within the flaming arms of the idol.

Wherefore contumely is also an enormous sin of the same nature as murder. It is the first fruit emanating from hatred when the latter begins its pernicious activity. The angry man, unable to control his fiery temper, vents his fury upon his brother, first by lacerating him with his tongue, by heaping upon him insults and imprecations.

From words he passes to violent blows, and finally extinguishes the flames of his furious passion in the blood of his fellow man. With good reason then did the divine law place these three crimes in the same category, and mete out to them the same punishment. For all three equally offend against fraternal charity — the bulwark and foundation of human society. What conclusion should we draw from these important instructions? First of all that we must be upon our guard against these three execrable monsters, and especially banish at all cost from our hearts that malignant hatred which is the unfortunate source of every iniquity. This is the solemn admonition our Lord Himself gives us in the following words: "If thou offer thy gift at the altar and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled with thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift."

In the Old Law it was strictly forbidden to interrupt the sacrifice. But the Divine Master wished an exception to be made in behalf of those not at peace with all their fellow men, not only with those whom we have offended, but also with those who have offended us. He wishes to remove all rancor, thus showing us that otherwise God would not accept, but reject our oblations. He will not be disposed to grant us peace, unless we seek it beforehand with our fellow men. If our Divine Master exacted so much of those taking part in the sacrifices of the Old Law which were simply shadows and figures, we may readily infer what He expects of Christians wishing to approach the Eucharistic table, most appropriately called the Sacrament of peace and love. Let no one therefore presume to receive Holy Communion, if he be not reconciled with his brother. He who lays not aside every rancor from his soul, is unworthy to approach the altar. Daring to do so, he would be guilty of sacrilege. How can the God of peace abide in a heart burning with hatred?

Divine charity is that fragrant perfume which enamors the Word of God, binding Him with pleasant but powerful cords to souls. "I shall draw him in the bonds of love."

Do we wish our justice to abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, so that we may obtain salvation? Then we must love, because God is love, and who continues in the love of God is united to God. No power can separate you from Him either in time or in eternity. "God is charity: Who abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him." Love therefore, because just as hatred is the negation of the whole law, love is its consummation, its compendium and synthesis. Charity is the fulfilment of the law. Love therefore, because in love is found true justice — that justice which Jesus Christ demands of His followers, that justice which is sufficient but also necessary and indispensable if we wish to acquire a claim to His eternal rewards.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

To-day we have occasion to admire and bless the goodness of the compassionate heart of Jesus, His providence towards men, and His infinite power in alleviating all our wants. The gospel records the wonderful multiplication of loaves and fishes performed by our Lord in the desert, to satiate the hunger of the famished multitude. This prodigy which He wrought one day for the benefit of the Jewish people, if we consider it well, is continually repeated by God for us, His poor famished creatures, in the desert of this miserable life. In the gospel fact we see delineated as in a miniature painting the grand work, the ineffable operation of Divine Providence to preserve the human race during its sojourn upon earth. You may be convinced of this truth by listening attentively to the explanation of this morning's gospel.

I

"In those days, again when there was a great crowd, and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples together, and said to them: I have compassion on the crowd, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat." Four thousand persons, moved by the desire of hearing Jesus and witnessing the miracles He wrought, had followed Him for a long distance into the desert, without heeding at all the hardships of the journey, although fasting and feeling the pangs of hunger.

What a reproof to so many slothful Christians who regard as annoying their religious obligations, and are constantly seeking vain pretexts to be dispensed from their

fulfilment. They allege as excuses the inclemency of the weather, domestic duties, the care of children, and a hundred other difficulties. But did not the crowds of the gospel have also their occupations? Yet nothing prevented them from following our Lord for three entire days. For our miserable bodies we voluntarily undergo so many hardships. Without complaint we endure so many inconveniences and expose ourselves to so many dangers. But for our souls we refuse to suffer the slightest inconvenience! I do not know to what extent our excuses will be valid in the sight of God, but I do know very well that if we wish to obtain eternal life, we must labor, combat, and suffer.

The evangelist notes that our Divine Master had compassion on the famished multitude. We do not read of any of them complaining or making a single request, nor is it known that the Apostles realized the extreme want suffered by that immense crowd.

Jesus alone realizes, pities, and provides for them. Let us be persuaded of this consoling truth. We have in heaven a most loving Father Who sees all our misery, Who is always ready to hear our sighs and lamentations, Whose heart is overflowing with compassion for our sorrows, Whose bountiful hands are eagerly outstretched to supply our needs. The egotistic world cares naught for us wretched creatures, and turns its back upon those who suffer. But the tender heart of Jesus does not act in this manner. Instead of reposing then our confidence in creatures, why do we not place it in our heavenly Father Who loves us so much? Why do we have recourse to men rather than to God? Why do we grow disheartened in the midst of suffering, instead of appealing to Him Who is most willing to help us? Know that when you consider yourselves lost and most abandoned, the help and consolation of heaven is nearest. It is then that the Lord will hasten to assist you. Good Christians have always maintained this confidence in God, and never have they

been disappointed in their hopes. This reliance in supernatural aid has ever been ridiculed and derided by the foolish children of the world. But what does it matter? The divine promises never fail. Although the Lord seems occasionally to delay His help in order to try our virtue, His assistance can certainly not fail. Even the Apostles thought it impossible to satiate the multitude in that deserted locality. Hence they remarked to our Savior: "Whence can any one satisfy them with bread here in the wilderness?"

But what are you saying, oh, poor Apostles? Do you really think that no one can supply their wants? Have you not in your company that Jesus Whom you so often witnessed under your very eyes performing the most stupendous miracles? Have you not with you that Jesus Who, in your presence, gave sight to the blind, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and cast out evil spirits? Do you imagine therefore that to Him is lacking the means and power of appeasing the hunger of a famished multitude howsoever numerous?

The same answer we might give to those who ridicule us for confiding in God, to those who gloating over a momentary triumph of impiety, boast of having put an end to the Church of Christ. What insanity! Are you not perhaps aware that the Church possesses Christ Who will abide with her all days unto the consummation of the world? Do you not know He has promised that the powers of earth and hell shall not prevail against her? Are you ignorant of the fact that He has always defended her against all her enemies, and that she emerges victorious from all her struggles? How then could we lose confidence in the protecting hand of God? True, we have no other hope but in Divine assistance; but that hope suffices to keep us buoyant and tranquil amid the most violent persecutions.

Our Lord made no reply to the objection of the Apostles, and without further ado simply asked them how many

loaves they had. Hearing that they had but seven, He commanded the crowd to sit down upon the ground. Then taking into His adorable hands first the loaves and then the fishes, He blessed them, broke them, and gave to His disciples to distribute among the multitude surrounding Him. Wonderful to relate, by the contact of His sacred hands, the loaves and fishes multiplied in such a manner that four thousand persons ate and were satisfied. So great was the abundance of that marvelous repast that of the fragments they gathered up seven baskets full. This act of omnipotence fills the soul with wonder and amazement.

But does not our Lord continue to renew every day a miracle similar to the one He performed in the desert? Observe the farmer. He scatters a few seeds in the soil, and in the summer he gathers those seeds marvelously multiplied into his granary. Is not this a prodigy equal in substance, but different in form?

Who produces this wonderful multiplication? Is it perhaps the work of your arms, the earth, the sun, the air, and the rain? No, it is God alone Who employs these means to accomplish the great wonder. Divine Providence is continually multiplying the seed in order to supply His needy creatures with food, just as the Divine Master multiplied the few loaves and fishes in the desert to feed the hungry multitude.

The wonder afforded us by our fields does not surprise us. It produces little or no impression on the soul, because it is a frequent, ordinary and continual occurrence. Yet it is just as inexplicable and grandiose as the one our Lord performed near the shores of Lake Genesareth.

What would become of us if God suspended this miracle just for one year, if He deprived the earth of its productive power and rendered it sterile? Would not that alone suffice to make us die of hunger? Would not that alone be enough to destroy the whole human race? Yet we are so proud as to deem ourselves self-sufficient and to have

no need of God! We wish to live as may suit us best without any regard for Him. What would the proud, arrogant world do with all its wealth, with all its vanities, with all its discoveries, its progress, its inventions of agricultural implements, and economic science, if Divine Providence should not annually repeat the prodigy of multiplying the fruit and grain which serve for our nutrition and for the preservation of the human race? Oh, we must be densely ignorant in order not to understand this great truth, and if understanding it we must have reached the height of malice in order proudly to raise our face against a God so infinitely good, Who furnishes us with our daily food, just as a loving father provides for his family.

Learn then from to-day's gospel to confide in God's infinite goodness, and hold for certain that if as good Christians you follow Jesus for the interests of your soul, He will see to it that you may never want for your necessaries.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Frequently our Lord forbids us in His holy gospel to judge our fellow men. He wishes us to leave the exercise of this sovereign right to God alone. He wishes that while always rigorous with ourselves, we must be merciful and benign towards others. We must call nobody wicked, because we may be worse than our fellow men. Since we can only see the outward appearances which are often deceptive, it might easily happen that we condemn an innocent person as guilty. Besides, if the simple faithful are forbidden to judge others, the same prohibition is incumbent upon superiors and those having the care of souls. It is their duty and right to study the moral conduct of those entrusted to them, to ascertain which are the good and which the bad, in order to protect the former and correct the latter. For this reason our Divine Master gives His Apostles the criterion they must employ in distinguishing good from wicked Christians, also the punishment reserved for the latter. Let us listen respectfully to His divine word and use it to our spiritual advantage.

I

"Beware," said our Lord, "beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." In the world there are two classes of wicked people; some are public, evident, while others are secret and occult. There are wicked persons not ashamed to appear as such, and who even boast of their impiety. There are, however, some wretches who in order not to lose credit in the estimation of worthy people,

pretend to be virtuous and conceal their wicked character under the attractive appearance of a false goodness. This race of hypocrites is certainly worse than public sinners, because sincerity pleases even in crime itself. They are also far more dangerous, because you know that a public enemy is preferable to one who works in the dark. But how can we recognize these hidden sinners concealing themselves behind the mask of virtue? How can we guard against their machinations and malign influence? "By their fruits," says our Lord, "you shall know them." A most beautiful sentence truly worthy to issue from the mouth of a God. If you wish to know, continues our Lord, the nature of a plant, you do not confine yourself to a consideration of the outward appearance, the branches, flowers, and foliage; but you wait to see the fruit it will produce. If the fruit be sweet and wholesome, you conclude that the plant is good. If, on the contrary, the fruit be nauseating and hurtful, you rightly infer that the plant must be bad. No one ever beheld the monstrosity of gathering grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. Thorns will produce nothing but thorns. "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

If we apply this constant law of nature to the moral order, we immediately perceive that the certain, infallible way to judge men is by their actions. The true Christian is an honest and well behaved man. As such he must appear in all the actions of his life. When you see therefore a person who frequents the Church, approaches the sacraments, respects the ministers of the sanctuary, who fulfils the duties of his state, reveres his parents, loves his wife, takes good care of his children, when in his business affairs you see him adhering strictly to the rules of justice, refusing to injure his fellow men, in fact helping and benefiting them according to his means; when you behold him correct in speech and still more correct in deed, abhorring every unchaste word, detesting every im-

proper act, you can safely call that man a true Christian, a good plant, because the fruit he produces is excellent. It can never happen, as our Lord declares, that an evil tree can bring forth good fruit. It can never occur that a bad Christian can lead a blameless, virtuous life.

Beware, however, of that other Christian who although he frequents the Church, occasionally approaches the sacraments, boasts of hearing Mass on Sundays and holidays, of reciting his prayers, of taking part in religious functions, and on that account pretends to be a type of the true Christian. At the same time you observe him squandering his wages in dissipation, gambling, and drunkenness, without any love for his family, without care of his children or fidelity to his wife; if you scrutinize his moral conduct, you discover in him a malevolent disposition; a character who hates his fellow men, injures them in their honor and in their property by his calumnies and injustices, a libertin and home-wrecker continually running after other women, a filthy vulgarian scandalizing the community by his abominable talk and lewd jests, a sacrilegious blasphemer whose ordinary conversation is bespangled with oaths and imprecations,— if such a man poses as a true Christian because he complies in a material, perfunctory way with religious duties, do you really place any faith in his pretensions? Certainly not, for the reason that a good plant could not possibly produce such rotten fruit, because a good Christian cannot live worse than an infidel. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit."

Be convinced of it, oh parents. An evil plant can produce nothing but evil fruit. If your children are irreligious, dissolute, if they surpass you in impiety, what wonder? You brought them up; they are the fruit, the parasitic plants which you produced. "An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit."

Observing your children we can know your character accurately without danger of deception. We can say to

you that they bear to you a most striking resemblance. They are your worthy offspring. "By their fruits you shall know them."

And do you know the fate in store for these malignant plants? "Every tree," says our Lord, "that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire."

The scythe of death, oh sinners, will sooner or later cut the thread of your life, and then the Lord shall cast you away to burn amid the flames of an inextinguishable fire throughout eternity. Yes, the fire will be your well merited punishment, that fire which God prepared for Lucifer and the fallen angels, that fire which the breath of Divine anger fans continually for the chastisement of the impious who did not know Him.

Your pride then shall be humbled and your arrogance will cease amid those tortures. But not even the ardent flames of hell can purge your malice which shall be indestructible, eternal.

Our Lord concludes His discourse with a sentence that we should fix firmly in our minds. "Not everyone who saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who doeth the will of my Father Who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

He wished to say that in order to obtain salvation, it does not suffice to believe in God, to acknowledge the divinity of His incarnate Son, and to invoke His holy name; we must furthermore respect His will, observe His commandments, execute all that He demands of us. If you strive to act in this manner, you will be the true lambs of the mystic fold of Christ, and not wolves in the clothing of sheep. If you act in this way you will be true and good Christians. As such even the world will recognize and respect you. As such you will be recognized by God Himself Who shall one day reward you with eternal life.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

If we scrutinize the world we notice an untiring solicitude, a feverish anxiety for transitory and perishable interests, an incessant toiling and striving of soul and body to amass wealth, to make a name, to procure enjoyments and pleasures. We behold the great majority of men attached to this miserable earth. Their dominant thought is to have a good time. They do not scruple to employ dishonest means and to commit even the most flagrant injustices for the attainment of their sordid ambitions. Let us therefore listen this morning to the words of our Divine Redeemer. He speaks of a final reckoning which He will demand of each one. At the same time He teaches us how we may amply provide for our individual case.

To render His teachings more popular and persuasive, He proposes them in the parable of the unjust steward summoned by his master to render an account. Let us listen with interest and attention to this lesson of the gospel.

I

"There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods." Who is this rich man, if not Almighty God, the absolute Master of all things? Without exception everything in heaven and upon earth is His, because everything was created by Him, preserved by Him, and if He chose, could be reduced by Him into nothing. We ourselves are His possession because from Him we received our existence, our preservation, and all the goods with which we are endowed. Improperly therefore we poor

mortals call ourselves masters of our earthly fortunes. They are not really ours, because God can take them away from us when He wishes in order to give them to others. They are not ours, because after enjoying them for a few years, we must leave them in spite of ourselves, at least at the hour of death. We are not even masters of our own body, otherwise we would protect it against the sufferings, the sickness and infirmities that so frequently assail it. We are not masters even of our life, since against our will we must one day leave it.

Not being masters of the goods we possess, it follows that the use of them is not left entirely to our caprice, but must be regulated by Almighty God. We must employ them as He wishes. It follows moreover that we should not become inordinately attached to them, as we do not love intensely objects that are not in our power. Man should therefore regard himself as administrator of these things entrusted to him. There is the just idea that we should entertain of our true condition upon earth.

The Lord, absolute Master of all things, distributed a portion of these created goods to men. To some He gave more, to others less. To one person He entrusted five, to another two, to a third perhaps only one talent according to the relative capacity of each individual. Some He allows to become enormously rich, others to be placed in comfortable circumstances, while others again may have only the bare necessaries of life. But to each of us He gave something that we might use it for the attainment of our end, that we employ it in His name, for His honor and glory. He has set aside a special day to call us to account and tell how we have used it, so that He may reward us according to our merits. Were all men to take this view of life, how much happier and contented they would live, and how many crimes would be avoided! As a nation we seem to have gone money-mad. This frenzied desire for wealth is a most prolific source of iniquity.

Were man to consider himself as he really is, not master, but simply steward, custodian, administrator of earthly goods, he would have no longer an incentive to accumulate riches. He would be content with the necessary, reflecting that the office of steward becomes more difficult in proportion to the extent of the stewardship. The larger the fortune, the weightier becomes the responsibility. But try this argument with worldlings, with the worshipers of mammon. Why it is enough for one to scrape together a few dollars more than his neighbor, and immediately he becomes insane with pride, inflated with his importance. He regards himself as absolutely independent and under obligations to neither God nor man. He deems himself master and not bound to render to anyone an account of his actions. Usually the first move of the parvenu as a manifestation of gratitude to God, is to turn his back upon religion and its practice. Oh, what folly, because also these unfortunates shall one day hear the summons: "Render an account of thy stewardship, for thou shalt be steward no longer."

The day will therefore come, and sooner perhaps than we expect, when each one shall appear before the Eternal Judge, and hear those brief but awful words: Render an account of your actions. Render an account, O Libertin, of the fortune squandered in order to satisfy your sensuality. Render an account, O Drunkard, of the money wasted in dissipation and drunkenness. Render an account, O Frenzied Financier, of that immense fortune which was not the gift of my liberality, but the fruit of your own dishonesty and crooked dealing. This day of inexorable justice will arrive immediately after death. For scarcely shall we have closed our eyes in death than the soul shall stand in the presence of the Eternal Judge, our absolute and supreme Master. He will exact of us a strict account of all our goods temporal and spiritual, of the graces badly administered. And after having rendered our account to God, will that be all? No, our trou-

bles then will only commence. You heard of the punishment inflicted upon the faithless steward. He was deprived of his office and reduced to extreme indigence. We likewise, if found faithless, shall be stripped not only of all the goods possessed upon earth, but shall be subjected to all the horrors of eternal misery, a misery the like of which is not to be found upon earth. It consists in the complete and absolute separation and privation of God, the inexhaustible source of all wealth and happiness.

II

Observe how the steward thought immediately of his safety when he saw himself exposed to the danger of being thrown out of employment. Notice the cunning, the prudence and industry employed to extricate himself from the difficulty. "What shall I do," he said, "for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship. To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed." Then after a moment's reflection, joyful in the thought of having discovered a means of providing for his support, he added: I know what I will do that when I shall be removed from the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. Therefore calling together every one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first: How much dost thou owe my master? But he said, one hundred barrels of oil. Take thy bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another: And how much dost thou owe? Who said: a hundred quarters of wheat. He said to him: Take thy bill and write eighty. Oh, what a philanthropic, generous hearted man he was, not with his own but with his master's goods! He supposed that the debtors whom he favored so much would manifest later on their appreciation of his kindness. When expelled from office, he expected them to receive him and provide for his support. One good turn deserves another, and they certainly could not desert a friend.

And strange to say, the lord praised the unjust steward.

Why? Because he acted unjustly? No, but as the gospel declares, forasmuch as he acted wisely. Hence our Lord exhorts us to be prudent as the serpent. The master did not commend the fraudulent act in itself; he simply praised the cunning and prudent manner of its execution. Therefore our Savior added that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. The wicked, the infidels and sinners are wiser, more industrious in the pursuit of things pertaining to temporal life, than the followers of Christianity in regard to things pertaining to life everlasting.

Let us imitate then the steward of the gospel, and by this is certainly not meant that we should imitate his thievery and dishonesty which unfortunately has become with us a sort of national vice. But we should imitate his prudence and industry by making to ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity. Thus our Lord designates riches, because the frenzied and inordinate craving after wealth frequently leads men into iniquity, into sins of injustice. Hence the proverb calling money the root of all evil.

We can make to ourselves friends of the mammon of iniquity by using properly the temporal goods entrusted to our care, relieving the wants of those in distress, contributing according to our means to charitable and other worthy purposes. Thus we shall acquire merit before God. These meritorious actions will be recorded in the book of life. Upon our departure from this world they shall be in heaven beforehand like friends to receive us into everlasting dwellings.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Our Lord weeps and grieves bitterly upon beholding the blindness of the Jewish people, and foreseeing the awful chastisements that would overtake them. They are the tears of a father sorrowing on account of his children who through their transgressions bring upon themselves inevitable misery. They are the tears of a friend who sees his companion advancing to destruction and unwilling to recognize his dreadful condition. It is the last effort employed by our Savior to recall the guilty to repentance. Woe to him despising those tears, for he will not delay in experiencing the severe punishments of divine indignation. Our Lord in fact passes immediately from grief to anger. After having wept over unhappy Jerusalem, behold Him inflamed with holy zeal and forcibly ejecting the sacrilegious profaners from the temple. Goodness in Him was not separated from justice. He was just as well as merciful. In His adorable Person He united these two virtues which at first sight might seem to exclude each other because apparently contradictory. Let us briefly meditate upon this episode of our Savior's life which is pregnant with salutary instruction.

I

The gospel narrates that when Jesus drew near Jerusalem, He felt Himself so overcome with emotion at sight of the holy city that He wept. He does not weep foreseeing the scorn, the insults and torments which that ungrateful city was preparing for Him. He does not weep at the thought of the ignominious death of the cross to

which He would be condemned by the very ones He loved with a father's tenderness. But He weeps only and is grieved at the misfortune of others. Is not this alone an evidence of His infinite goodness? Our miseries move Him more than His own sufferings. He grieves more over the chastisements entailed by our sins than over the outrage they offer to His infinite majesty. Are you in the state of sin? Reflect that while indulging your sinful inclinations Jesus weeps for you, because He foresees the awful fate awaiting you. But let us consider the motive for which Jerusalem became the object of His intense sorrow. He reveals the motive in those lamentations to which He gave expression at the time of His weeping. "If thou also hadst known and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace: but now they are hidden from thine eyes." Jerusalem was called the Holy City because it was the only place where the true God had a temple and an altar. It was truly the cradle of so many prophets and just men who rendered it famous by the lustre of their eminent virtues. But Jerusalem did not merit this glorious title by reason of its inhabitants, a superstitious, stubborn, hard-hearted race who frequently turned their backs upon God, their Benefactor, in order to worship false gods. More than once they stoned the prophets. Obstinate in their prejudices, they refused to recognize in the humble Nazarene, the promised Redeemer. They continued machinating the greatest crime ever perpetrated, or that could be perpetrated by a nation, the crime of deicide.

Jesus weeps therefore over the blindness of that nation refusing to acknowledge in the Son of Man the only begotten of the Father, their Redeemer, and giving credence rather to the declaration of their high-priest that salvation was to be found only in His death. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not." (Jo. xi, 49.)

The same thing occurs with the pastors of the Church.

The wayward members of the flock revel in sinful amusements. They seek their happiness in iniquity while we deplore their spiritual blindness. Your illicit enjoyments are for us a motive of grief, not because we dislike to see you happy and contented, but because we know that your pleasures are vain and will soon be transformed into the most bitter pain. We weep, for we know that sins will eventually bring down upon us the chastisements of God. We know that you are seeking diversion upon the brink of a precipice, whilst you ought to fear and tremble. As it is our desire to seek only your good, your blindness is consequently for us a motive of the greatest sorrow.

After the Divine Master had manifested in clearest terms the real cause of His sorrow, namely, the culpable blindness of the people, He proceeds to indicate another motive of His grief. It was the awful chastisement that menaced them. Assuming a prophetic tone, He exclaimed: "The time shall come when thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee and compass thee round and straiten thee on every side. And beat thee flat to the ground and thy children who are in thee, and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."

With these serious words our Lord predicted the destruction of unhappy Jerusalem, the punishment which God had prepared because it had rejected and killed the Messiah.

The prediction, as you know, was fulfilled in every detail. The siege of the city began under Titus, the Roman general, about thirty-seven years after the death of Christ. The assailants cast a trench about Jerusalem, thereby cutting off all communication and straitening her on every side. The massacre of the inhabitants, to read the number, seems like an exaggeration. Its truth, however, is certified by the concurrent testimony of Jewish and Pagan historians who calculate the deaths at one million one hundred thousand! In order to force the surrender of

the inhabitants, the besiegers crucified daily five hundred persons, until no more wood could be found for making crosses. A famine set in so severely that Jeremiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled, and mothers ate their own offspring. The Romans finally took the city by storm. Whoever fell into their hands was slaughtered; they spared neither women, nor children, nor even the aged. Human blood flowed in torrents through the streets. The palaces and temple were destroyed. Those who escaped the general carnage, famine and pestilence, were sold into slavery and scattered over the face of the earth. Now after the lapse of twenty centuries their descendants are still wanderers without country, altar, or temple, a most tragic monument of Divine Justice and a striking evidence of Christ's predictions.

In this awful tragedy we behold an intimation of our own case. When the priest contemplates the long series of human iniquities, when he considers the many prevarications of Israel, he deplores them deeply in his heart. The least he can do is to raise his voice in solemn admonition to those going astray, and warn them in the name of Heaven of the severe punishments they will incur. Without laying claim to the gift of prophecy, but basing our assertion on the divine word, on faith, reason, and experience, whenever we priests observe an unfortunate wretch wallowing in the mire of sensuality and dissipation, we can predict without danger of making a mistake that he will eventually pay the penalty. When corruption becomes general, when it inundates the cities and spreads over the entire country, then our sorrow increases still more, and we need not be surprised if pestilence, war, earthquakes and calamities overwhelm degenerate and corrupt society.

Think of the great empires of the ancient world, of the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans who perished when they sank into sins and vices. Our Lord's words remain ever true. "He shall destroy the wicked

and the sinners together; and they that have forsaken the Lord shall be consumed." (Is. i, 28.) Sinners indeed, because blinded in their malice, usually receive with derision the admonitions of the priest. They regard him as a howler of calamity, and continue their downward course. But that will not enable them to avoid the merited punishment, just as the Jews did not escape, although they laughed while Jesus wept. The day of rude awakening will come to the obstinate sinner. At the hour of death his soul will be besieged by enemies encompassing him on every side and giving him no peace. He will fall into their hands and they will not cease to torment him throughout eternity.

Let me therefore exhort you never to allow yourselves to become by your actions an occasion of sorrow to Jesus Christ, but rather a motive of joy. If you have had the misfortune to cause Him to weep on account of your transgressions, let not His tears be fruitless. Take advantage of them by performing works of penance which will liberate you from those faults and punishments that are the cause of our Redeemer's weeping and will render you worthy of sharing in His eternal rewards.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The parable or rather story of the Pharisee and Publican which our Lord recounted one day to the crowds is always beautiful in its ingenious simplicity. By analyzing it in all its parts, I hope to offer you a fragrant bouquet of most useful instructions. For the word of God differs radically from the word of man. It has a universal virtue. It applies to all ages, temperaments, and conditions, to the learned and to the uneducated, to the great and to the small. Humble, modest, ordinary in form, it is most pregnant with meaning. Whoever removes the veil concealing it, will therein discover inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and virtue. For this reason the Church obliges us to explain it to you, so that you may enjoy its hidden beauties and experience that wonderful power which it always exercises over the soul. Listen therefore attentively to the words of life which the Divine Master offers for our consideration.

I

Pride is a detestable passion which vilifies and degrades man in the very moment it pretends to elevate him to the skies. Howsoever excellent the merits of a person may be, he loses all prestige and becomes despicable just as soon as he allows himself to be dominated by vanity. On the other hand, that man becomes attractive and amiable who cultivates a modest opinion of himself and is not ashamed to acknowledge his inferiority. Still more despicable is religious pride, that believing one's self overflowing with virtue, rich in merits, mature in perfection, as the Scribes and Pharisees foolishly imagined themselves.

Such pride is really the antithesis of virtue and holiness which is based upon modesty, on the firm conviction of one's own misery and nothingness. In order therefore to confound this foolish pride and to enlighten certain deluded people who trusted in themselves as most just, perfect, and holy, and despised others, our Lord narrated this parable: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican." From this you may infer that the most appropriate and convenient place to pray, is the Church which on that account is styled a house of prayer. "My house is a house of prayer." True, God is everywhere and we can find Him everywhere. In all places we can raise our minds to Him and offer our supplications. But you will readily admit that the Church is the most suitable place to fulfil this duty. There the Lord is especially attentive to our petitions and extends His bountiful hands to bestow upon us the gifts of His infinite mercy. Although He resides everywhere by His immensity, He abides in the Church with His real presence. In the Church we find that recollection which is vainly sought elsewhere. Distracting noise and worldly tumult do not penetrate the Church. Within its hallowed walls peace, silence, and tranquillity prevail. There the soul can more easily raise itself from earth, unite itself to God, and give free rein to its affections. And what shall we say of those pretending to say their prayers while engaged in domestic affairs? That is certainly no way to pray. Even though unable to visit the Church for the recitation of your prayers, you should at least withdraw into the silence of your room and kneel down before some pious picture, for your mind cannot be recollected while the senses are distracted. Without this recollection prayer is of no avail. It becomes simply a mechanical exercise of the lips without any power to move the heart of God.

Observe furthermore that the Pharisee and publican went to the temple solely to pray. In this they differed

from so many Christians who, judging from their behavior, visit the Church in order to gossip, chat, and satisfy their curiosity, with their gaze wandering here and there to see who comes and goes, perhaps even with sinister intentions which would be a sacrilegious profanation of the holy place.

The Church was made for prayer and not for recreation, much less a rendezvous in which to offend Almighty God. Its doors are open to all, to Pharisees and publicans, to the just and especially to unfortunate sinners. The motive enticing these latter to enter its sacred precincts should be praiseworthy and holy, otherwise as sacrilegious profaners they should be excluded so that their presence may not be a source of scandal to good Christians.

The gospel tells us the prayer both of the Pharisee and publican. The Pharisee standing prayed thus with himself: "O God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as even this publican. I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all I possess."

Does this manner of praying please you? Prayer is a petition which we make to God. The man who prays should realize his own misery, and feel the need of humbling himself before God. The Pharisee does just the opposite. In behavior and language he reveals a disgusting pride, an exaggerated self-esteem. He remained standing, thus reminding us of certain Christians of the present day who seldom deign to bend their knees in the house of God. They seem to carry a flippant air, as if they defied the Creator and ridiculed the devotion of the faithful.

In conformity with his attitude the Pharisee's words were full of childish vanity and revolting pride. What does he ask of God? Absolutely nothing. Instead of exposing his needs to the Almighty, he is deeply absorbed in cataloguing his merits. Instead of reciting a prayer,

he delivers a pompous eulogy of his virtues. Pushing his presumption to an abnormal extent, he did not hesitate to prefer himself to all other men, designating them all as sinners, not finding a single just man outside of himself. Is it not true that pride is a real delirium, a folly blinding man and causing him to lose his reason?

Beseech God to preserve you from this unfortunate passion, to inspire in your heart the intimate conviction that you are nothing in His sight, in fact worse than nothing, because by nature inclined to evil. The little good we may do and possess, is not our gift or merit. The only thing we can claim as our own is sin and weakness.

"The publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, saying: O Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

This may indeed be called a true prayer. This poor sinner, convinced of his nothingness, of his unworthiness, dares not advance into the temple, but remains at a respectful distance. He hides in a remote corner, as if fearing to profane with his presence the sanctity of the holy place. He does not venture to raise his eyes to heaven, but confused and penitent he holds them fixed upon the ground. Striking his breast through deep compunction, without any human respect he confesses himself a great sinner. He humbly begs of God mercy and forgiveness. "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

The Lord is infinitely good to those who have offended Him. He regards, not the multitude of our inquities, but only our repentance.

Even were our sins as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sands on the seashore, He is ever ready to forgive them all, provided we have truly an humbled and contrite heart. But that is what sinners generally lack. For this reason the Blood of our Lord seems often to be poured in vain upon sinful souls in the sacrament of penance. How many times you have perhaps approached

this tribunal of mercy without realizing the enormity of your offences committed against God, without comprehending the miserable state of your conscience! How often have you come to confession with a deplorable air of frivolity, laughing, joking, chatting, without feeling in your heart the slightest disgust for your sins, or fear of the punishment they have justly merited! Hence instead of returning home with divine pardon like the fortunate publican, you leave the Church like the proud Pharisee, more guilty than when you had entered. Through lack of sorrow and compunction your confessions for the most part are sacrilegious, thus provoking more and more the anger of God. Detest therefore the pride of the Pharisee, and imitate the humility of the publican. Do not boast of your merits, but acknowledge your misery. Then will the Lord hear your prayer with favor, and if you ever had the misfortune to become debtors to His justice, He will generously grant you pardon, " for he that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

During the brief period of His earthly sojourn, our Lord went about doing good, as the multitude was compelled to acknowledge, being convinced by the irresistible force of His miracles. "He hath done all things well." He did good to every class of persons, to the great as well as to the small. He benefited individuals, and collectively the moral body of society. He did good, not only in the spiritual order of grace, converting so many unfortunate sinners and enlightening men who sat in the shadow of death, but also in the visible, material order by healing those afflicted with infirmities. He was pre-eminently a benefactor even though he be regarded solely in His social relations, without considering at all His divine origin. That, however, did not render Him immune from the hatred, calumnies, and persecutions of His enemies. It did not prevent Him, the most beneficent among men, to be at the same time the most persecuted.

From His example we His ministers derive courage to endure with resignation the hatred of the world. As a matter of fact we should glory in having the same treatment as our Divine Master, for then we can reasonably hope to be truly His disciples. "If they have persecuted me, they shall also persecute you." Let us consider one of the many benefits conferred by our Divine Lord, namely, the healing of the deaf mute, and derive from it the moral lessons characteristic of all our Savior's works.

I

A deaf mute presented himself one day to our Lord in order that He might lay His hand upon him and cure

him. This unfortunate man was born without the use of two senses so necessary to life, hearing and speech. Unable to hear the slightest sound, he could not articulate a word. Muteness in fact is a natural result of deafness, even when there be no physical defect in the organ of speech. Take a person who from infancy has never heard another's voice; he may utter a few inarticulate sounds like the irrational animals, but he will never be able to articulate a single word, much less carry on a conversation, unless it be with his fingers. How do children learn to talk? By hearing others talk. Isolate a child, segregate it from society, so that it may never hear the utterance of a word. That child will grow up a mute.

Now there is the very same relation existing between these two faculties in the spiritual order. God imparts the precious gift of faith by means of hearing. "Faith cometh from hearing." He desires that we listen and learn revealed truths from the mouth of His ministers. The ear therefore is the avenue through which the preaching of the gospel enters into the hearts of men and wins them over to the faith. Such was the way, as you well know, in which the gospel was spread over the earth and still continues to be spread among infidel nations. It was not by scattering bibles broadcast over the face of the earth.

Now if you should close your ears in order not to hear the word of God, if you rendered yourselves voluntarily deaf, if you purposely avoided the hearing of the gospel or its explanation, evidently such conduct would produce in you the densest ignorance regarding matters of faith. You would find yourselves mute like infants, absolutely unable to converse intelligently about religious truths. For this reason some people, when questioned about doctrines of the Church by non-Catholics, are unable to give an answer, or if they attempt an explanation of their faith, it is usually one devoid of sense and doesn't explain. The

Lord preserve you from this spiritual muteness which is a much greater affliction than lack of speech, because it is always by nature culpable.

Our Lord took the deaf mute aside, apart from the multitude, in order to teach us that in doing good the Christian should prefer solitude, secrecy to publicity. Our good works should not be paraded, when charity does not demand it. They should be performed under cover, away from the world's gaze. We should never seek our own glory, but the glory of God in our works. He who does good with the sinister motive of gaining human applause, loses all his merit. Remember the precept which our Lord gave us: that the left hand should not know what the right hand doeth. Let us clothe our virtues with the veil of modesty, and the little good we accomplish, with God's help, will be manifested by Him at the proper time to our greater glory.

After our Savior had taken the deaf mute aside from the multitude, He put His fingers into his ears, touched his tongue with saliva, and looking up to heaven, He groaned and said to him: Ephpheta, which means: "be thou opened." Was it really necessary for our Lord to employ all these ceremonies in order to heal that unfortunate man? Certainly not, because, first of all, He is omnipotent and can do whatever He chooses by a simple act of His will. Besides, those remedies had no proportion to the end, nor did they possess any inherent virtue to cure a deaf mute. His cure in fact depended entirely on divine power.

Why then did our Lord use them? With these visible signs He wished to dispose the deaf mute to appreciate the miracle He was about to perform. He wished to reveal more clearly His infinite power and show that with means having no proportion whatever to the end, He could produce such astounding effects. Most of all He employed those ceremonies for our instruction. It was the finger of God that opened our ears. Hence let them

always be disposed to hearken to His voice, in order to learn His commandments, to hear His counsels and inspirations. Let them be ever closed to impious, immoral, lascivious discourses; let them be closed to the suggestions of wicked friends and companions; let them be closed to all conversations carried on without the fear of God. Let our tongues speak with discretion, let them not be loquacious, licentious, slanderous. Let our words be seasoned with the salt of wisdom. All these symbolic rites are employed by the Church in the solemn administration of Baptism. The priest places salt on the tongue of the child, saying: Receive the salt of wisdom. And justly so, because it is from a person's manner of speaking that he is judged foolish or wise. Speech is the expression of thought. By speech man reveals what is going on in his mind and heart. By speech man reveals the extent of his knowledge and wisdom. The priest touches with saliva the ears of the person to be baptized, repeating the same efficacious word pronounced by Christ to the deaf mute. Ephpheta. Although the corporal ears of the infant may be healthy and open, still the ears of the soul are closed. The understanding is darkened by that ignorance which is one of the fatal consequences of original sin and which can only be cured by the frequent hearing of eternal truths.

"And immediately his ears were opened and the string of his tongue was loosed and he spoke right." Behold the accomplishment of the miracle. The Divine Will surmounts all obstacles. God's will is identified with His power. "He spoke and all things were made." The gospel tells us the deaf mute "spoke right." Would that the same could be said of every Christian. But unfortunately a great many speak wrong. A great many employ their tongues to curse, swear, and blaspheme, thus showing the greatest ingratitude to their Benefactor. You who from birth enjoy the incomparable gift of speech, use it in conformity with God's will. Your

tongues have been sanctified by the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Hence never should they be desecrated by obscene language or immoral, profane conversation. Employ the gift of hearing to educate yourselves, the faculty of speech to edify your fellow men. Thus in this twofold faculty you will one day receive your recompense, because you will be permitted to hear the celestial harmonies and to sing the divine praises throughout eternity.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Our Lord calls the Israelites of His time blessed, because they enjoyed not merely the rare, but the unique privilege of beholding His adorable person, of witnessing His miracles, of hearing the words of wisdom that escaped His lips. It was indeed a coveted favor to which so many illustrious people and powerful monarchs vainly aspired. Meanwhile a lawyer came boldly forward to tempt Him, and asked what he should do to obtain eternal life. Our Lord replied that as a doctor of jurisprudence, he should observe what the law prescribed, namely, that he should love God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and his neighbor as himself. Not content with this answer, the scribe inquired still further what our Savior meant by that word — neighbor. Jesus gave him a true conception of it by narrating the parable of the poor traveler left half dead on the road-side by the robbers, and how he obtained from a Samaritan the generous help denied him by the priest and Levite. Let us comment on this Scriptural passage and admire in this parable the wonderful traits of Divine charity towards the human race afflicted with mortal wounds.

I

" Blessed are the eyes that see the things that you see." Blessed are you, O my disciples, who see what forty generations in vain desired to behold, what so many patriarchs, prophets, and just men were unable to see, what so many illustrious people of future ages down to the end of the world will not be privileged to witness. Yes, you are blessed because to you alone has been con-

ceded the privilege of contemplating the Messiah, the Son of God, the desired of all nations, of hearing His voice and witnessing His miracles.

But were there not many others who saw Jesus Christ the same as the Apostles? Why are they also not called blessed by the Divine Master? True, they all beheld Jesus Christ, but they recognized Him only as an ordinary man, the son of a carpenter. They did not behold in Him the hidden Divinity, the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. They were like those inanimate idols of which the prophet said: "They have eyes and see not."

Could the Divine Master then call those unfortunates blessed who were plunged in such deplorable blindness that they could not see the light of the sun? Our Lord calls the Apostles blessed on account of their faith, because they believed what they could not see with the material eyes of the body. They beheld only a man, but this man they believed to be God. So true is this that in another passage of the gospel our Lord calls blessed in this regard also the believers of future ages, those who had not the privilege of beholding Him in the flesh. "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." We therefore are blessed who believe in Jesus Christ, in His doctrine, in His promises, although we are not permitted to see Him. While unfortunate indeed were the Jews who saw Him without recognizing, adoring, or believing in Him. And in this world where incredulity counts so many adherents there is an overwhelming number of such unfortunates. These people see with their eyes and almost touch with their hands the divinity of the Christian religion and of the Catholic Church. Yet they refuse to recognize and follow it, confounding it with so many other religions that are evidently false. They regard it as a human institution. They attack it in every way, persecute and attempt to destroy it, just as the Jews sought to destroy its Divine Founder. Shall we

not call them unfortunate and feel sorry for their inexcusable blindness? In order to be unbelievers they boast of wisdom, and in their ignorant pride they foolishly despise those who believe. That however does not prevent them from being most miserable and deserving of our commiseration.

While Jesus was calling His disciples blessed, behold a doctor of the law came forward with the question: "What must I do to possess eternal life?"

There was a question of capital importance, of first and absolute necessity. The present, transitory, fugitive life is directed towards another life that is unending, eternal. We are here only as wayfarers. We are journeying towards the house of eternity. Hence the reasonable question which, from the beginning of the world all serious-minded men have asked themselves, is this: What must I do in order to be happy in the life to come? A great many, however, think only of the present and forget entirely the future. They are submerged in temporal affairs, and most neglectful of eternal interests. The questions usually asked by them, are these: What must I do to win that case, to succeed in that enterprise, to obtain that office, to better my social condition, and increase my fortune? What must I do to prosper that undertaking, to reap that advantage, to gratify that passion, to regain health and prolong life? What must I do to pamper my miserable body? They never ask: What must I do for my soul in order to gain heaven and escape the never ending pains of hell? Why so much thoughtlessness and sloth? Is the soul perhaps of less value than the body? O people, more blind and perverse than the ancient Pharisees, I recommend you to them that they may teach you with what prudence you should provide for your most vital interests.

To the Pharisee's question our Lord replied that the law was clear on that point, and that as a doctor of the law he ought to be familiar with its requirements.

"What is written in the law?" He answering, said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

Our Savior said to him: Thou hast answered rightly; this do and thou shalt live. But he willing to justify himself, said to Jesus: And who is my neighbor? Our Lord then patiently undertook to explain to him by the parable of the good Samaritan whom we should properly consider as neighbor. The term comprises not the Jews alone, but all men without exception, irrespective of their creed and nationality, because all have the same origin, the same end, the same nature. Thus our Lord amplified the sublime precept of fraternal love which men had distorted and restricted. He presented it in its true aspect and made of it a universal law.

In this parable of the Samaritan He depicts at the same time His infinite love for mankind. The human race in fact is readily recognized in that unfortunate traveler whom the robbers stripped, mortally wounded, and left half dead on the public highway. The assassin of the human race, as you already know, was the demon. In the earthly paradise he stripped humanity of sanctifying grace, of the right to eternal happiness, and left him a victim to the hardships and sorrows of this miserable life. No one had any sympathy for this great misfortune, no one tried to remedy it. And whosoever would have tried, would have met with failure. All the wise and powerful men of antiquity failed. The priests of the Old Law did not succeed, for they avoided all intercourse with the Gentiles. A Samaritan alone felt compassion for the unfortunate human race. He decided to save it and generously sacrificed himself for its redemption. That good Samaritan was Jesus Christ.

The Jews thinking to insult Him, called Him one day by this name. "Do we not say well that thou art a Samaritan?" Instead of taking offense, He did not re-

sent the appellation, as He did so many others. Thus He tacitly approved of it. He was in fact that good Samaritan who, beholding the human race mortally wounded and destined to perish, was moved to compassion. Leaving the glory of heaven, He came down upon earth to save it. Humbling himself even to the death of the cross, He bound up our wounds with the bonds of His charity. He poured upon us the oil and wine of His sacraments. As if these tender cares were insufficient, He conducted the poor human race to the inn of His Church, and entrusted it to the ministers of that Church, saying: "Take care of him and whatever thou shalt lay out over and above, I will repay thee at my return."

This is genuine history which we cannot contradict. Even at the present day we experience the benefits, the tenderness, and love of this good Samaritan. Are we covered with the wounds of sin? He heals them in the sacrament of penance. Are we thirsty and famished? He slakes our thirst and appeases our hunger at the Eucharistic table with His adorable Body and Blood. This immense, inexhaustible charity of Jesus Christ should be the model of ours. Let us love our fellow men, as the Lord has loved us. Let us love our neighbor, not from a motive of self-interest, but guided solely by the sentiment of our duty. Let us love all without exception, even those who do not love us, even those who repay our benefits with hatred and persecution. Thus our Lord concluded His conversation with the Pharisee: "Go thou and do likewise."

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

If it be true, as Pope St. Gregory observes, that the Divine Master during His earthly sojourn was accustomed to teach not only by words but also by works, so that His actions should be regarded as so many precepts, then surely to-day's gospel is pregnant with salutary instructions. In the wonderful cure of the ten lepers we find circumstances so extraordinary as to merit special attention. Why do these unfortunates live apart from human society? Why does not our Lord Himself heal them, instead of sending them to the priests? How does it happen that of the ten who were healed, only one returned to his Benefactor in order to express his gratitude? Let us carefully examine these questions, and we shall see how our Divine Master arranged all this for our salutary instruction.

I

As our Lord was going to Jerusalem, He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain town, there met Him ten lepers, who stood afar off; and lifted up their voices, saying: Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. Why did these unfortunate men stand afar off from human habitations and dwell in the open country? You must seek the reason of this in the special legislation which Moses made for the people of Israel. The Mosaic law required lepers to be segregated from society. Leprosy being a contagious disease would soon infect the entire population, were it not for the observance of these rigorous precautions. The same is done at the present day by our legislators with

their pest houses, quarantines, fumigations, isolation zones, and a hundred other measures intended to isolate contagion, and provide, as they say, for public hygiene.

These sanitary rules are reasonable and just, because health is a precious gift which we should preserve with every diligent care. We may observe, however, on this point that "unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." (Ps. cxxvii, 1.) Should He want to punish us, there is a countless variety of ways in which His chastisements can overtake us. We might observe furthermore that similar precautions should not be neglected in order to check another contagion still more disastrous, that is, the contagion of sin, of which leprosy is a figure. But no thought is given to that. Every effort in fact is made to spread the contagion of error and immorality among the people. It may be asserted without exaggeration that in the dissemination of this poison demoralizing and murdering souls, individuals manifest the same eagerness which they display in arresting the progress of the disease which destroys the body. How then can we reasonably expect our Lord to withhold His chastisements?

Scarcely did the poor lepers discover our Divine Redeemer than they cried out: "Master, have mercy on us." To whom else could these unhappy men have recourse, if not to Him, the Father of mercies and the God of every consolation? They were abandoned by the world, in fact exiled from human society. Jesus was their only, their supreme hope. And is not that the condition of every unfortunate sinner? Is not that the condition of us all? When you find yourselves infected with the most loathsome leprosy of sin, would you have recourse to men in order that they might cleanse and heal you? Men can indeed communicate the contagion of sin by their bad example, but they are utterly incapable of restoring health to the soul and freeing it from hell. No other hope remains but in the infinite mercy of God. And

blessed are you if, like the lepers, you hasten to invoke that mercy, if you seek the Lord's assistance in time.

You are blessed, I repeat, because there are many who despise this mercy, and prefer to wallow in their iniquity. Oh, poor lepers, unfortunate sinners, acknowledge for once your misery, and seek the physician who will cure you. Lift up your hearts to Him. Direct to Him this cry of sorrow and at the same time of hope: "Lord, have mercy on us."

How did our Lord answer the prayer of the lepers? Instead of healing them instantly, as He was accustomed to do, He ordered them to go, show themselves to the priests. In order to understand the motive of this command, you should know that in the Old Law God had appointed the priests judges of this disease. He had ordained that whoever was cured of leprosy, before returning to civil society from which he was until then excluded, should submit to the inspection of the priest who decided whether or not the cure was perfect. In this particular case the end of the law ceased. Hence neither the examination nor the decision was needed. Yet our Lord insisted upon the observance of this legal requirement, in order to teach us what we must do, if we wish to be cleansed from the leprosy of sin which contaminates, consumes, and kills the soul. We too must show ourselves to the priests and candidly manifest the leprosy covering us. We must confess all the evil committed, all our most hidden and secret iniquities.

To some people it seems a useless, tyrannical burden to confess one's faults to an ordinary man. What good will it do, they exclaim, to acknowledge our sins to a creature like ourselves? It is much better to confess our faults secretly and directly to God, and He seeing our sorrow will immediately grant us pardon. Thus many speak at the present day who wishing to sin without let or hindrance, are opposed to sacramental confession and strive to show its uselessness. But why should we deceive our-

selves? For the sinner there is no other way of obtaining pardon. Penance, says St. Jerome, is the only plank of salvation after shipwreck. I know well that, absolutely speaking, God could remit our faults without need of confession, just as He could have cleansed the lepers instantly. But He does not wish to do so. He has appointed priests as the judges of human actions. He has given them the power of binding and loosing sins. "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." Hence He remands us to their tribunal, so that they may take exact cognizance of the state of our soul, and pronounce their judgment either of condemnation or of absolution. That judgment is ratified also in heaven. It is not the time for showing the wisdom of this divine institution and the great importance of sacramental confession. It is enough for us to know that it is God's will and ordinance.

We miserable creatures have no right to expect God to render us an account of His act, much less has the person offending any right to dictate to the person offended the conditions on which pardon and reconciliation may be obtained. While the ten lepers were on their way to the priests they were miraculously cured. Only one of them returned glorifying God with a loud voice. He fell on his face at the feet of Jesus and gave thanks for the favor obtained. The other nine did not bother about testifying their gratitude, but continued indifferently on their way. Our Divine Master did not wish to let such base ingratitude pass unnoticed. He therefore expressed His surprise and just regret in these terms: "Were not the ten cleansed? And where are the other nine? There is no one found to return, and give glory to God, but this stranger!"

Of how many Christians may not the same and even worse be asserted! From God they receive continual benefits spiritual and temporal. From Him they have

every good, and they never think of returning Him thanks. Oftentimes they employ His very gifts to offend and insult Him. They abuse their health, mind, and wealth in order to transgress His holy commandments. How many have recourse to God when afflicted and distressed, when they want to receive some benefit from Him, and after having obtained it they ungratefully turn their backs upon Him! Remember that ingratitude is a detestable vice even in the eyes of the world. Imagine what an abomination it must be in the sight of God!

In conclusion let us retain the valuable lessons afforded us in to-day's gospel. Avoid most carefully the company of those infected with the leprosy of sin, so that they may not communicate to you their contagion. If you yourselves are infected with this leprosy, if you are sinners, confidently have recourse to the Lord Who alone is able to cleanse you. In compliance with His command, go, show yourselves to the priests who have been divinely authorized to distinguish the various kinds of moral leprosy. Finally show your gratitude to God for the benefits which He never ceases to confer upon you, and especially for this greatest of all benefits, namely, for having cleansed you so often from the leprosy of sin, and restored you to His friendship, generously granting you that forgiveness which alone can open to you the gates of heaven.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

God is supreme Lord; all insensate creatures serve Him and blindly accomplish His will. For a still greater reason man should serve Him by obeying that law of nature which God Himself has written in the human heart. But this God is a Father, and as such we owe Him a loving obedience, an unlimited confidence, because He takes care of us. "Casting all your solicitude on Him, for He hath care of you." (I Peter v, 7.)

Yet it seems as if the Lord of heaven were not enough for man whom we see doubting of Divine goodness, and making for himself upon earth another god, a god of precious metal, an idol of gold to which he offers homage and adoration. Our Lord deplores this unfortunate worship, and openly declares it impossible to divide the heart by giving one portion of its affections to God, and another to riches. "You cannot serve God and mammon." Hence He exhorts us to remain always faithful to God and shows us His loving providence in His government of the world.

I

After the original fall man was condemned to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Hence labor, instead of being dishonorable, is obligatory and decreed by God Himself. In fact it becomes so necessary that those unwilling to work, do not deserve to live. What our Lord severely reproves and condemns is the needless anxiety that man displays regarding his temporal wants, that inordinate solicitude to provide for the necessaries of

life, that insatiable greed to make money and accumulate riches. Unfortunately man has given to that word — *necessaries* — quite an arbitrary and extensive meaning. By it he implies not merely his daily bread, but also whatever is needed to gratify extravagance, luxury, and all the cravings of the greedy passions. Therein consists the vice of avarice which St. Paul calls the root and fountain of every iniquity, that ugly vice which has caused so many Christians to apostatize from the faith, that brutal vice which prefers vile money to the Creator; that infamous vice against which the Divine Master let loose His terrible menaces. "Woe to you rich." That accursed vice which placed on sale the Redeemer of the world. "What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him to you?"

Since man becomes enslaved to this passion, because turning his gaze away from God from Whom comes every gift, and thinks the acquisition of temporal goods the result of his genius, his industry, his ability, our Lord exhorts us to raise our eyes to heaven in order to discover the true source of every earthly blessing. "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, nor for your body, what ye shall put on." Was it not God Who gave you life? Was it not God Who fashioned your body with His hands? Can you then fear that He will allow you to want for the necessaries to preserve your temporal existence? Is not the life more than the food? and the body more than the raiment? Everything, absolutely everything comes from Him. We miserable creatures would never have existed, had not He in His infinite goodness drawn us forth from our original nothingness. We could not live, but would die instantly, if He did not preserve us with His loving providence, if He failed to supply us every day with the food that sustains and maintains us. Let us once for all be persuaded of this great truth that we can do nothing without Him, that all our labors and efforts would become useless, if He did not enrich them

with His blessing. You may plant the seed and moisten the ground, but you can never cause the seed to grow, blossom, and fructify. "Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (I Cor. III, 7.)

You may rest assured that if you fear the Lord, if you remain faithful to Him, and place in Him all your confidence, He will never allow you to suffer want, since He abundantly provides for all inferior creatures. "He gave food to those fearing Him." "Behold the birds of the air for they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field how they grow, they labor not, neither do they spin. Yet I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these." Show me the purple, silk, or satin of kings that can compare in delicacy and beauty with the variegated, brilliant coloring of a flower.

"Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which is to-day, and to-morrow is cast into the oven," if Divine Providence manifests so much liberality towards the most insignificant creatures, how much more beneficence will He show to you, His creatures of predilection, His beloved children!

"Be not anxious, therefore, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed?" Leave all these cares and solicitudes to the unfortunate Gentiles who unhappily are ignorant of God's loving providence. They place all their confidence in false divinities made of metal, stone, and wood that cannot see their wants, nor give them assistance. But you repose confident and tranquil within the arms of this heavenly Father Who sees and knows your smallest needs. Hence He does not fail to supply them, for He is both able and willing, since He is infinitely powerful and good. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Besides, we should be convinced that it avails naught to fret and worry. "Which of you, by anxious thought, can add to his stature one cubit?" You realize continually your weakness over your body, howsoever much it may be under your dominion. You can neither diminish, nor increase its size. You cannot remedy its defects, nor impart to it beauty, strength, or vigor, in spite of all your solicitude. Yet you wish to worry over the acquisition of external things which are absolutely independent of you and obey only the will of God? Thus our Divine Master reasoned. Thus He sought to imbue His disciples with full confidence and abandonment in Divine Providence regarding the necessities of the present life. His words are so clear and His arguments so evident that they need no further comment.

But how important is the precept which He places as a seal to His exhortation, and which He draws as a necessary consequence from the doctrine He announced! Be not anxious, He says, about temporal interests which are transitory and of little moment. But be solicitous about the interests of your soul which are of absolute importance. Be not anxious about food and vesture, but seek rather the kingdom of God and His justice. Be anxious about His heavenly grace and the exact observance of His law in which true justice consists.

We are not like dumb animals destined to live for a while upon earth and then disappear into nothingness. We have a soul destined to flourish in immortality, a soul which was created for eternity. The purpose of our earthly existence is to labor solely for this future destiny. All that passes away in the course of time is nothing but vanity deserving of indifference and contempt. One thing alone is truly necessary, that is, to love God and serve Him alone.

Let us not follow the example of Martha who deserved to be gently admonished by Christ because she allowed herself to be worried and anxious about earthly cares.

" Martha, Martha thou art careful, and art troubled about many things." Let us rather imitate Mary who chose the best part, forgetting the body in order to attend exclusively to the soul, always anxious to hear the voice of her Divine Master. " Mary hath chosen the best part."

Man guided even by the light of natural reason feels in himself something that raises him above all the vanities of earth. He feels himself called to a higher destiny. This our destiny is heaven which shows us its supernal splendors, its ineffable beauties and delights. Before such a spectacle how rapidly the fascination of earthly delusions vanishes and how sordid the earth appears! Towards heaven then let us turn our thoughts and aspirations. Towards heaven let us direct all our steps, our efforts and hardships. Towards heaven let us never tire of tending until we have finally reached this happy goal: " Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice."

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

To-day's gospel recalls to our minds the thought of death and of the future resurrection — two ideas producing upon men a different impression according to their moral dispositions. For the just, death and more particularly the resurrection is an argument of hope rather than of sorrow. For the wicked it is a motive of terror. They are frightened more at the thought of rising again than at the prospect of dying. And reasonably so, because in death they see only the end of their brief period of enjoyment, whereas in the resurrection they behold the commencement of eternal suffering.

Commenting on the miracle wrought by Christ in raising to life the son of the widow of Naim, we necessarily broach two important and decisive points of our existence. From the impression either of hope or of fear that you experience, you may know in a measure the state of your soul. Happy the young man of Naim to whom our Lord restored the life of the body; but still happier you, if you can regain the life of the soul. The word of God is continually performing in the world this second prodigy which undoubtedly is greater than the first. Listen therefore with respectful attention that you may obtain this most important end.

I

While our Lord, followed by His disciples and a great crowd, was approaching the little city of Naim, He encountered near the city gate a funeral procession. They were carrying to the grave an only son of his mother; and she was a widow and a great crowd of the city accom-

panied her. Death excepts no one. According to the calculations of human prudence, it seemed as if he should have withheld his inexorable scythe in the present case, and have spared that poor young man. He was in the flower of youth, the sole comfort and support of his widowed mother, and the last branch of the family which with his demise would become extinct. All these considerations favored the delusion that in this instance death might appear a little more indulgent and benign. But death makes no exception of persons.

You imagine that you are not destined to die at least for a while, because you are young and enjoy good health, because you feel the fullness of life coursing through your veins. But do you not notice how many young people are continually dying, although vigorous, healthy, and robust, the same and more so than you? Have you never observed that death creates greater havoc among youth than among those of an advanced age? Has it escaped you that few reach old age and those few are regarded as an exception to the rule? This truth is corroborated by daily experience, and the chief cause of it is the great laxity of morals, the disorders of life. How many young people enter premature graves through dissipation? Where corruption prevails, there mortality is greater, health poorer, and life shorter. Be virtuous, and you will have a better chance of living a long time. That is the best means to avoid sickness and to keep death afar off. The gospel relates that the dead man was being carried outside the city to the cemetery. The funeral cortege comprised his widowed mother and many other mourners. There is the last pathetic scene closing the drama of our miserable life upon earth. The moment we are overtaken by death, they will think immediately of burying our body, of removing from the sight of man this useless encumbrance, this object of grief and horror. They will arrange to enclose it in a grave so that the living may not become infected by its corruption. A few tears may be shed by

sorrowing relatives who will speedily forget us. A few friends and acquaintances may accompany our remains to their last resting place, and then all is over. Our name and our memory will disappear with our body in the silence of the tomb.

Well for us that we have a tender mother who does not abandon us after we become extinct, but accompanies us to the grave. This tender mother is the Church. She mercifully takes care of the children dying within her bosom. She renders funereal honors to their mortal remains, sprinkling them with holy water, perfuming the air about them with the sweet odor of sacred incense, and burying them beneath the shadow of the cross. Our holy mother, the Church, does not forget her deceased children. Every day she aids them with her suffrages, and exhorts the faithful to pray for the souls of the departed that through the mercy of God they may rest in peace.

What advantage is there in the funereal pomp which the world bestows upon its departed votaries? None whatever. It does not benefit the body which neither sees, nor hears. It does not help the soul which needs something else besides empty honor and vain splendor. The Church indeed obtains through her suffrages that relief which becomes advantageous to the departed souls. You may rest assured that the Lord respects the sorrow and hears the prayers of this divine Mother. On account of her supplications and sorrow He shows mercy to the departed, liberating them ahead of time from the prison of their expiation in order to lead them into the peace of eternal life.

You have a proof of it in the gospel narrative. That poor, disconsolate, weeping widow moved the most tender heart of Jesus to compassion. Her tears, her mute but eloquent grief incited the Divine Master to work a prodigy that she never would have even dreamed of asking. In order to console her, our Lord approached the bier, and touching it, said: Young man, I say to thee, arise! In

these few words do you not hear as it were an echo of that divine command which will resound on the last day? Then the angels, executors of the Divine Will and ministers of His omnipotence, will blow their trumpets, and they will cause to reverberate to the farthermost corners of the earth these brief but eloquent words: Arise ye dead and come to judgment.

Just as the dead young man of Naim revived at the voice of Christ and arose from his bed of death, so the entire defunct human race, at the sound of the angelic trumpets, shall awaken as one man from its deathly slumber and return alive from the sepulchres. Our reason cannot comprehend this astounding prodigy. Neither can it deny its possibility. Just as the power of God recalled to life the son of the widow, so it can arouse from the sleep of death all the sons of Adam. Yes, the Lord will perform this great wonder, in order to gather us all before His tribunal in the valley of Jehosaphat. He will do it in order to manifest all human iniquities to the gaze of the universe. He will do it in order to render each man the reward or punishment that he shall have merited. After Jesus had brought the son of the widow of Naim back to life, a great fear seized all, and they glorified God, saying: "A great prophet is risen up among us and God hath visited His people."

Thus universal surprise and fear will seize all men on the last day at sight of the astounding miracle and in expectation of the tremendous judgment. But this fear will not be the same for all. The just will experience a reverential fear mingled with a feeling of profound peace and latent joy. For the wicked, on the contrary, it will be a despairing fear, an awful dread filled with pain and horror. The just, like the crowds of Israel, will glorify the Lord Who displayed His infinite power in making them eternally happy. The reprobates will curse and blaspheme God Who gave a manifestation of His omnipotence in their great confusion and punishment.

These great, solemn truths are rarely considered. For this reason the world is filled with iniquities and scandals; for this reason the proud in their nothingness laugh at Almighty God.

Think frequently of death which at any moment may cut short the course of your sinful pleasures. Think frequently of the future resurrection which may open to you the passage-way to a myriad of eternal sorrows.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The gospel shows us our Divine Master almost invariably in contact with the Scribes and Pharisees. He forms with them a most emphatic contrast, the same in fact that exists between innocence and guilt, love and hate, candor and deceit. This malignant sect followed our Savior about wherever He went. They were drawn, not by the holy enthusiasm which attracted the multitude, but were instigated by envy and the sinister purpose of doing Him evil. Even when apparently showing Him honor and respect, it was simply a ruse to ensnare Him in His words or actions. Thus we read in to-day's gospel how He was invited out to dine in the house of one of the chiefs of the Pharisees. The invitation was conveniently issued for the Sabbath in order to see how He would keep its observance. We behold our Savior paying no heed whatever to His critics, but healing the man afflicted with dropsy and sending him on his way.

He takes advantage of the occasion to impart a few lessons of humility to those people dominated by the spirit of pride. If the Pharisees failed to profit by His teachings, let us endeavor to receive with profound respect the sublime truths which the Son of God teaches both by word and example.

I

While Jesus was seated at the table of the Pharisees, they kept their eyes fixed upon Him. They did this, not in order to admire in Him the extraordinary personage who had become so popular and famous throughout Palestine by His astounding miracles, not in order to behold a per-

son who under the most humble appearances concealed the sublimest virtues, but with the stupid intention of discovering in Him some latent fault or imperfection. Does it not seem possible to find some trait of resemblance between yourselves and the Pharisees? Are you not sometimes all attention in watching your neighbor, full of malicious curiosity in scrutinizing his every act and word? Are you not occasionally overwhelmed with solicitude in seeking his defects in order that you may afterwards enjoy the satisfaction of exposing them? While you readily perceive the moat in your neighbor's eye, you fail to behold the beam obscuring your own vision. Why are we not rather anxious to discover the good in others, so that we may praise them and imitate their example? Because like the Pharisees we are filled with malice, having a taste only for evil as conformable to our fallen nature, and feeling a nausea for good as contrary to our inclinations.

In order to have at least a pretext for calumniating our Lord, the Scribes and Pharisees very likely pre-arranged to have the dropsical man presented to him, taking for granted that being the Sabbath day He should not cure him. If He dared to heal the unfortunate man, they would denounce Him as a transgressor of the law. Our Lord Who easily read the wicked designs of their hearts, proposed to them this question: "Is it lawful or not to heal on the Sabbath day?" Observe our Savior's wisdom, how He adroitly led His enemies into the very snare they had prepared for Him. This is about the way they reasoned when they placed the sick man before Him. Either He will cure this man, or he will refuse to cure him. If He cures him, then we can condemn Him as violating the law. If He refuses to cure him, out of deference to the Sabbath Day, then we can denounce Him to the people as one altogether indifferent about healing them of their infirmities. Our Lord therefore with His question frustrated entirely their malicious designs, and made them fall into the very trap intended for Him. For, had they re-

plied that it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day, they no longer would have reason to calumniate him. If they declared healing unlawful on the Sabbath, then they would incur the people's hatred. Not knowing what to reply, they kept silent. Then our Savior, stretching out His hand, healed the man immediately.

This manifestation of divine power ought to have filled them with admiration. It ought to have brought about their conversion and incited them to have humble recourse to Him; to Him Who while restoring health without the slightest effort to the sick man, could with the same facility deprive them of both health and life. But when a man is blinded by pride, he does not allow himself to be swayed by even the most astounding miracles. You have an example of it in Pharaoh who, instead of yielding under the force of so many prodigies wrought by God through the hand of Moses, became more and more obstinate in his insane pride and continued to resist the Lord's will. You have an example of it in so many Christians at the present day who are unwilling to open their eyes in order to see the truth. They refuse to recognize and obey the Catholic Church in which Jesus Christ lives, notwithstanding the stupendous and manifest miracles that evidently demonstrate its divine origin. In fact is it not a continual miracle, the wonderful preservation of the Jewish people after twenty centuries without a temple and an altar, without country or priesthood? Is it not an example without parallel in the world's history the constant fulfilment of Christ's prophecy regarding the miserable destiny of this unfortunate people?

Is it not moreover a striking prodigy that the Church of Christ has been established and spread throughout the entire world by the agency of twelve timid, illiterate, uneducated fishermen? Is it not a miracle that this Church progressed in spite of all the obstacles which a universal idolatry placed in the way of its advancement? Is not its preservation miraculous in spite of the strength of its

enemies sworn to its destruction? Is it not a wonder that the Visible Head of the Church, although persecuted, robbed and humiliated, is nevertheless happier, more powerful and glorious than those who persecute, rob, and humiliate him? Yet the foes of Christ do not yield to the light of these miracles, just as the Pharisees refused to surrender upon witnessing the miraculous cure of the man afflicted with dropsy. Like them they are blinded by the passion of pride, that accursed passion which penetrated heaven itself and the earthly paradise, transforming angels into demons and ruining the whole human race. You ought therefore to be upon your guard against it, mindful that it will render you abominable in the sight of God. It will deprive you of His grace and bring down upon you the weight of His indignation.

Perceiving how the Pharisees were infected with this spiritual ailment rendering them far more miserable than the unfortunate victim of dropsy, our Lord like a benevolent physician endeavored to cure them of it, by relating to them the parable of the man invited to the wedding. "When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place, lest perhaps one more honorable than thou be invited . . . and he that invited him and thee come and say to thee: Give this man place: and then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when thou art invited, go, sit down in the lowest place; that when he who invited thee cometh, he may say to thee: Friend, go up higher. Then shalt thou have glory before all them that are invited."

With these words our Lord wished to imply that pride renders us hateful not only in the sight of God, but also in the eyes of the world. Whereas humility renders us dear not only to Heaven but also to men, and leads him to glory without his seeking it. Is there anything more ridiculous than to see an insignificant individual putting on airs? Is there anything more pitiful than to behold a young lady infatuated with herself and imagining that

she is the cynosure of all eyes by reason of her gown or beautiful head gear? Is there anything more nauseating than to behold a young man scarcely out of his teens presuming to criticize the Church, its bishops and priests, to decide off-hand the most complex problems of the day! Oh, the educated man, the man of solid merit and virtue is humble. Going through the country, and passing a corn or wheat field did you notice which ears of corn and sheaves of wheat stood high and erect? Well, it was the empty ones containing nothing but dry straw. Those laden with wheat are naturally bent over. Why all these crazy notions and ambitions? Do you not realize that we are simply a little animated dust, that to-morrow we may sink into the grave, that in a short while you will become a mass of worms and putrefaction with all your beauty, talents, ornaments and ambitions?

Hence our Lord exhorts us to be humble, " for he that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Be humble, because you are nothing in the sight of God and He alone is great. We are nothing even in the eyes of the world, for if we go outside the narrow limits of our own neighborhood, beyond the narrow circle of friends and acquaintances, nobody recognizes us and our name is unknown. Be humble because Jesus Christ was humble. " Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart." Be humble because your Savior humbled Himself even unto death. Finally be humble if you wish to save your immortal souls, for our Lord Himself declares that unless we become humble as little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

In last Sunday's gospel we saw how our Divine Master humbled and combated the pride of the Pharisees by the light of His miracles and the power of His words. In to-day's gospel we behold the conceit of the Pharisees mortified by the admirable wisdom of God's word. These implacable enemies of Christ had approached Him in order to annoy and embarrass Him with their insidious inquiries. They were overwhelmed with confusion by the sublime answers of our Divine Redeemer. They should have profited at least once by the severe lessons given them. They should have attentively received into their withered hearts the seed of those salutary doctrines which our Lord inculcated. They should have learned to abandon their silly, useless efforts and respect a person who had afforded them so many illustrations of His infinite wisdom!

But unfortunately they became more and more obstinate in their perfidy. Becoming so completely enveloped in the mantle of their detestable pride, they failed to behold the light shining about them. Let us learn at their expense to appreciate the salutary seed of that divine word which they allowed to perish.

I

The Pharisees approached our Lord one day, and one of them, a doctor of the law, questioned Him in order to tempt Him. Jesus was goodness personified. All who approached Him in the right spirit, were never afterwards separated from Him. All who asked Him for graces and favors, went away happy and contented. Only the Pharisees remained strangers to these sweet communications of

tenderness and affection. The nearer they approached our Lord in person, the farther they withdrew from Him in spirit. Why? Because they sought Him with sinister motives and not with the right intention.

Something similar occurs at the present day. Jesus is always full of goodness, tenderness, and love for those confidently having recourse to Him in their spiritual wants, in their temporal needs, in the hardships of this miserable life. But how does it happen that so many Christians seek Jesus in the Church, in prayer, and in the sacraments, without experiencing any comfort, without deriving any advantage, but rather detriment? Why do they always become colder and more indifferent, more enslaved to sin and their passions? Because, like the Pharisees, they seek Jesus to tempt Him and not in order to obtain from Him remedies suitable to their wants. They come to Church and tempt Him with their irreverent behavior. In the recitation of their prayers they tempt Him with their voluntary distractions. In the reception of the sacraments they tempt Him with sacrileges which they rashly commit through lack of the proper dispositions. Seek your Divine Redeemer always, for He is your true friend, your generous benefactor. But seek Him like good Christians with the right purpose, with a pure intention, and not like the Pharisees in order to insult His goodness and arouse against you His just indignation.

But how did the Pharisee tempt our Lord? He asked Him which was the great commandment of the law, in order to ascertain whether He would arbitrarily make any modification or addition, since He claimed to be the Son of God.

Jesus replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul and with all thy mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is similar to the first: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."

All our duties, whatever may be their origin, are comprised in the one word: Charity. He who loves God as he should, is an exact observer of the law. He is a type of the perfect man, and pre-eminently a model Christian. In fact it is impossible to love God and not fulfil His will perfectly, and not observe accurately His precepts and commands no matter how arduous and difficult they may seem. Love knows no difficulty. It conquers all things, suffereth all things. The other two theological virtues, faith and hope, are comprised in charity. What can be wanting, exclaims St. Augustine, where charity exists? And what good are the other virtues without charity? "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (I Cor. xiii, 2–3.)

The demon himself believes, but he does not love. Nobody can love without believing beforehand. There can be faith without charity, but there can never be Christian charity without faith. A person may hope for pardon without loving God, although he hopes in vain. But no one can ever despair who loves God. In other words we can have hope without charity, but we can never have charity without hope. You can hope without loving, but you cannot love without hoping. What else? There is also that other precept of fraternal love which our Lord so highly recommended and designated as His own precept. He who loves God, must of necessity love his neighbor, because God commands him to do so. The person not loving his neighbor shows that he does not love God, for he transgresses His holy will.

Moreover, we must love our neighbor not for himself, not for our own sake because he happens to please us or render us some advantage, but for the love of God. We must love him because he was created by God, because he was made to His image and likeness. The ultimate object

of fraternal love is always God. By this we mean that in our neighbor we indirectly love God Himself. Our Lord therefore said most truthfully that the second commandment of fraternal love is like the first, because it is simply a reflection of the same light, a flame of the same fire which is divine charity. Hence the Apostle of the Gentiles was right in proclaiming charity the quintessence, the synthesis, the fulfilment of the entire law.

To the sublime answer of our Lord the Pharisees did not know what to object, so they raged in silence at their discomfiture. Our Lord, however, proposed to them a serious problem which, to their great shame, they were unable to solve.

"What think you," He asked, "of the Christ? Whose son is he?"

They replied immediately that he was the son of David.

Our Savior added: "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying: The Lord saith to my Lord: Sit on my right hand until I make thy enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how can he be his son?"

The difficulty which at first sight might embarrass a man of limited knowledge, was not however so complex that it should close the mouths of those posing as masters in Israel, as profound doctors of the law and deeply versed in Holy Scripture. In studying the Bible they should have learned that in Christ we must distinguish two generations, two natures, the divine and human, the nature of God and the nature of man. With this simple distinction the difficulty vanished. Jesus Christ according to his human nature was the son of David, because He was born of his family. According to His divine nature He is the Lord of David, because He was generated from all eternity in the bosom of the Father, and He is God like the Father, Creator and Lord of all things.

With all their knowledge the proud Pharisees were unable to give this simple answer which we might obtain from any child instructed in his catechism. Yet they had the

effrontery to question and endeavor to embarrass Christ Himself. Behold to what pride leads and how it blinds miserable creatures! Observe how our Lord humbles the proud and arrogant who presume to know more than any one else.

From to-day's gospel let us learn always to seek Jesus Christ with a pure and right intention, to observe accurately the first and greatest precept of the law — charity. Finally let us learn to be humble, because if we are humble we shall also be wise. In fact the height of wisdom is to know one's self thoroughly, to realize one's own misery and nothingness.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

To-day's gospel records two wonderful miracles performed by our Divine Lord in one and the same individual, two cures: one of the soul and the other of the body; the freedom from sin and the immediate liberation from an inveterate paralysis. The first of these miracles is internal, invisible; the second is external and visible, but serves as an evident demonstration of the first prodigy. It confounds the pride of the Scribes and Pharisees who vainly strove to impugn it. This portion of the gospel is most important because therein the divinity of our Lord may be deduced as a logical consequence necessarily flowing from the very principle laid down by His enemies. They said in fact that only God can forgive sins. Now Jesus Christ really forgave the sins of the paralytic and proved it by miraculously liberating him from his infirmity. Therefore Christ is God. Let us then carefully examine the circumstances of the marvellous fact, dwelling briefly upon a few of the moral reflections it suggests for our spiritual advantage.

I

Scarcely had our Divine Master landed from the boat which conducted Him to the city of Capharnaum on the shores of Lake Genesareth than some persons brought before Him a paralytic stretched upon his cot. They were anxiously hoping that our Lord would restore the unfortunate man to health. Here we may appropriately remark that whenever there is question of bodily ailment, the physician is immediately summoned. And it is right. The

same anxiety however is rarely displayed when spiritual ailments overwhelm the soul. We know from the gospel narrative that the soul of this unfortunate man was in a far more precarious condition than his body, for he was not only a paralytic, but also a sinner. Notwithstanding this fact, they did not even dream of asking our Lord to heal him spiritually, just like so many unhappy Christians when slightly indisposed rush to the doctor for a prescription, but pay no attention whatever to the awful maladies threatening their souls with spiritual death and damnation. Must we then believe that sickness of the body is more to be dreaded than that of the soul? The catechism will not allow us to believe it, for we are taught that we must take more care of our soul than of our body, because in losing our soul we lose God and everlasting happiness. Nor will the gospel permit us to believe it, because our Lord thought first of all to cure the soul of the poor paralytic. He said to him: "Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee." As if He wished to say to him: You ask the recovery of bodily health, and I grant you a far greater blessing by healing your soul of its infirmities. With these words our Lord wished to impress upon us another important truth, namely, the intimate relation existing between the ills of the body and those of the soul. He wished to convince us that sickness and infirmities are a fatal consequence of sin. Hence to conquer them we must remove the cause, that is, we must cleanse the soul from sin in order that the body may more easily and readily regain health. That is the first medicine of which the sick person should think. His first desire should be to reconcile himself with God, implore His mercy, and to satisfy Divine Justice by penance. Unfortunately this is not the usual custom. Some people imagine that the sacraments accelerate death, and with this mistaken notion defer their reception as long as possible. The priest is summoned to the bedside only when recovery is despaired of and the sick

person is in such a condition that he no longer knows what he is about. Disabuse your minds of this foolish prejudice. Instead of accelerating your death, the sacraments will hasten rather the recovery of bodily health, provided it be not detrimental to your spiritual welfare. In dangerous illness then be anxious to fortify your souls with the sacraments, instead of deferring their reception through superstitious fear.

Notice how our Lord showed mercy to the paralytic, having taken into consideration the lively faith of those who had brought him. "And Jesus seeing their faith," says the gospel. Faith is a virtue rendering a man dear to God. It is a necessary requisite in order to obtain from Him whatever graces we need either in the temporal or spiritual order. He who approaches the sacrament of penance, without faith in its efficacy, will not be able to obtain the pardon of his sins. He who prays and does not believe in the efficacy of prayer, prays in vain. The Christian who asks a favor of our Lord, but in a spirit of frivolity and inconstancy, will not obtain it. That is one of the principal reasons why our prayers remain so often unheard. People sometimes summon the priest to pray over a sick person that he may heal him with his blessing, just as those in to-day's gospel had recourse to our Lord in behalf of the paralytic. It certainly is a most laudable custom for the priest to visit and pray over the sick. The blessing of God greatly helps the sick. It infuses into their souls the necessary virtue of patience and resignation to the Divine Will. It gives the sick man courage and strength to endure his sufferings, and also enables him the sooner to regain his health.

For this reason the Church in her liturgy prescribes special prayers to be recited over the sick. Oftentimes these prayers and blessings of the Ritual avail naught, simply because the person for whom they are recited is destitute of faith, or has perhaps a superstitious faith. This is frequently the case among the ignorant. They

imagine that their illness is not natural, but superinduced by some malevolent individual with an evil eye who worked a charm against them. Consequently they regard all medical prescriptions as useless. They must have recourse to the priest's blessing. He alone can dispel the wicked charm. Do you think that anyone asking a blessing from Heaven with such dispositions will be heard? I think that our Lord, instead of blessing such an individual, will be inclined rather to punish him, for He rewards true, solid faith, and not lying superstition.

Now the faith of those bringing the paralytic to our Lord must have been of the right kind, for immediately He addressed to him these consoling words: "Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Some of the Scribes present when they heard our Savior utter these words, said within themselves: He blasphemeth, because he usurps a power, an attribute belonging exclusively to the Divinity. He blasphemeth, because God alone can forgive sins. He blasphemeth because being nothing else but an ordinary mortal, he has the sacrilegious effrontery to make himself God.

These conceited and malignant Scribes imagined that no one could penetrate their malicious thoughts. But Jesus confounds them. To their great mortification He publicly manifests the wicked sentiments passing through their minds. By this alone He showed that He was God, and that with Him the power of forgiving sin was not a vain assumption, a sacrilegious usurpation, but an essential attribute, a sovereign right. He therefore said to them: "Why do you think evil in your hearts? Which is easier to say: Thy sins are forgiven thee? or to say: Arise and walk?" Both these prodigies are impossible to man, but most easy to God Who exercises absolute dominion over the body as well as the soul.

Yet according to our way of understanding, if there might be any difficulty for Almighty God, we should say that the conversion of a sinner would be harder than

any miracle whatsoever. In the first case He encounters an obstacle in man's free will obstinately resisting the divine commands, while in the performance of a prodigy the whole material world is ever subject and obedient to His slightest wish.

Our Savior, as God, performed the first miracle liberating the paralytic from his sins, and as God He executed the second one freeing him from his infirmity. The sight of these wonders produced upon the multitude a most salutary impression, because, astounded and filled with admiration, they glorified God. May we also gather from them some fruit. May we cherish in our hearts those simple but most salutary reflections which we have striven to draw from this morning's gospel for our spiritual advantage.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

In the parable of the guests invited to the wedding our Divine Master gave a clear account of how much the Almighty accomplished from the beginning of the world, and how much He will do until the end of time in the interests of mankind. He also indicated how much men appreciated His goodness. Since we have been created, not for this world but for heaven, God has not confined Himself to giving us merely temporal life. He has taken every care to lead us to our last end. Hence from the beginning He established a church which He compared to a wedding feast. He strove to gather mankind into His Church as into a haven secure from life's dangers. Those profiting by His divine goodness and taking part in the great banquet to which they were invited, were saved. Those on the contrary rejecting this incomparable benefit were lost. As you see, our Lord refers to a most interesting fact which concerns us all. Upon it therefore let us seriously fix our attention.

I

Our Lord said to the chiefs of the priests and Pharisees that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a king who prepared a marriage feast for his son. According to St. Gregory, this kingdom of heaven is the church of the just. In the king celebrating the nuptials of his son, we behold a figure of God Who sent His only begotten Son into the world that He might assume humanity in the virginal womb of immaculate Mary. Thus He would bring about the nuptials of the divine with human nature

and subsequently the mystic union of Christ with His Church. It was absolutely necessary that all men should in some way take part in this spiritual wedding. It was necessary for all to believe the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word in order to obtain salvation. Hence God revealed it from the very dawn of creation immediately after the fall of our first parents. In the Old as well as in the New Dispensation, all were obliged to believe in the coming of Christ. Without this faith no one has ever been, or ever will be saved.

Who are those unwilling to take part in the nuptial feast? They are those refusing to believe that God has united to His adorable Person our poor fallen nature, that God has become man. They are those who in no way belong to the Church of Christ. They are the stray sheep, and how great indeed is their number!

"The king sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding, and they were unwilling to come." God in His mercy repeatedly sent to the Jews prophets and holy men in order to enlighten that carnal people and reveal to them the mystery of the Incarnation which was the ultimate purpose of the Mosaic law, in order to imbue them with a true idea of the Messiah and disabuse their minds of the distorted notion that He was to be an earthly warrior and great conqueror. But the carnal Jews turned a deaf ear to the invitations of those saintly men, and hearkened not to their admonitions. They obstinately continued to foster their prejudices and delusions.

"Again he sent other servants, saying: Tell them that were invited: Behold I have prepared my dinner; my beeves and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come ye to the marriage." In these words our Savior alluded to the second invitation given to the Jewish people through the Apostles, when the table was all ready and the viands prepared, that is, when in the fulness of time the Eternal Word became incarnate. But even this

time the blinded Jews rejected the divine call. Becoming in fact still more obstinate in their wickedness they persecuted the heaven-sent messengers and barbarously slew them.

God had used such patience with this people that He spared no pains to rouse them from their lethargy and conduct them on the road of salvation. But they did not co-operate, and the more He lavished favors upon them, the more obdurate they became in their blindness. What happened?

The gospel tells us that the king became angry and sending his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burnt their city. There you have a prophetic history of what happened a few years after our Lord's crucifixion. God, the Supreme Monarch of the universe finally manifested His justice, and decreed the punishment of that stiff-necked and fanatic people. He sent the Roman army to scatter and destroy them, and reduce to ashes their capital city of Jerusalem. From that period the Jewish people ceased to exist as a nation. They became scattered and wanderers on the face of the earth like the fratricide Cain, without country, without a temple, without a priesthood, just like the stones of an edifice destroyed by a devouring conflagration. This is the first part of to-day's parable showing us the measures employed by Divine Providence towards the people of Israel and the fate of that unhappy nation. The second part indicates the economy God has exercised towards the people of the New Law of grace.

II

"Then the king said to his servants: The marriage indeed is ready, but they that were invited were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as you shall find, call to the marriage." Before the coming of Christ the Jewish people alone were called to be beneficiaries of the divine promises, and all the other

nations were excluded from sharing in the divine benefits. In fact the law expressly forbade proselytes of Judaism to hold any communication whatsoever with the Gentiles. But since that people richly deserved to be reproved by God, for having obstinately rejected the invitations of heaven, then the economy of Divine Providence changed. All people of every tongue and nation were indiscriminately invited to take part in this divine banquet, namely, to enter the fold of the true Church and enjoy the fruits of Redemption. That wall of division separating the chosen people for forty centuries from all the other nations of the earth was broken down. The gospel by the command of Christ was announced by its promulgators to the whole world. "Going therefore teach all nations." Everywhere was set up the cross, the symbol of Catholic unity. Everywhere the famished people were satiated by the substantial bread of truth, and they embraced the Christian faith, becoming regenerated in the salutary waters of baptism.

That is the great blessing in which we have all shared. Our ancestors were submerged in idolatry, but having accepted the invitation of God, they became Christians and transmitted to their descendants that precious gift of faith which we now happily possess.

The gospel tells us that the banquet hall was speedily filled with guests. Indeed the Church of Christ spread as if by magic throughout the world. So great has been its diffusion that at the present day it numbers three hundred million communicants within its fold.

But then you may ask: Will all these be saved? No, not all who have taken part in the banquet of Christ and embraced His doctrine will be saved. Why? Our Lord Himself indicates the reason.

"The king went in to see the guests, and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he saith to him: Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? But he was silent. The king said to

the waiters: Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

What is the meaning of this wedding garment? It signifies sanctifying grace which is like a garment clothing the soul, and rendering it dear in the sight of God. Faith alone then is not sufficient for salvation. It must be accompanied by sanctifying grace and good works. For as the body without the soul is dead, so faith without good works is dead. "Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father shall enter the kingdom of heaven. If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

A man who believes, yet lives in the state of sin, at enmity with God, may belong indeed to the body of the Church, but not to the soul, and cannot enter into eternal life. His faith then is of no advantage to him, but rather a detriment. He lacks the wedding garment, and our Lord will expel him from the heavenly banquet. He will be cut off from the body of the Church like a withered branch, like a dried-up, useless member, and cast into the fire, there to be devoured by flames.

Do not imagine that there are only a few of such unfortunates living a life of sin. Everybody having any practical knowledge of the world, knows how rare it is to find honest, clean living men. Our Lord Himself closes to-day's gospel with a sentence that ought to make us tremble. "Many are called but few are chosen." It matters not how benign the interpretation may be that certain commentators may place upon those words; they cannot fail to fill the mind of the thoughtful Christian with apprehension.

Let us endeavor to belong to the chosen number. Faith is a free gift of God; it was not in our power to acquire it. Hence we should be grateful to Him for having given it to us in preference to so many others, and jealously

preserve it. On the other hand it lies within our power to regain divine grace, if we have the misfortune to lose it. Through penance and mortification we can render ourselves worthy of admission to the divine banquet. Let us not imitate the foolish ones who rejected the invitation. Let us not follow the many, but the few. Let us live like the few, like the small number leading exemplary Christian lives, if with them we wish to be saved.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

A very great difference intervenes between purely human and Christian faith which is a supernatural virtue. We believe so many mysterious and incomprehensible things because we can either see or feel them, because they are the immediate objects of our senses. On the authority of others we believe all the facts of ancient history. On the testimony of our senses we believe all those ordinary occurrences that frequently happen around us. On the authority of our reason we believe many truths that are purely ideal and abstract. Human authority, the testimony of the senses, and the light of reason are the three motives impelling us to believe those things which belong to the natural order. But are these the same motives on which the faith of the Christian reposes? In other words, do we believe the truths of our holy religion because others teach them to us, or because we see them with our eyes, touch them with our hands, or because our intellect understands their reasonableness, their evidence, just as it evidently knows that two times two make four? No, certainly not. The formal motive of our faith is only God's authority. We must believe the truths of our holy religion for the sole reason that God has revealed them. It suffices that we know for certain that God has spoken, in order that our faith may be reasonable, and that through our natural ignorance we may not run the risk of confounding the word of God with the word of man.

Hence our Lord has always sealed His doctrine with miracles. Thus our belief is rendered infallible because it rests on divine authority made evident through mirac-

ulous means. To-day's gospel affords a favorable occasion of demonstrating by a practical example the application of this general principle which ought to be clearly and indelibly imprinted on the mind of every Christian.

I

The gospel narrates that a certain ruler or magistrate of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, had a son seriously ill, in fact at the point of death. Having heard that our Lord had arrived in the vicinity, he immediately went to find him, beseeching him to cure his son. This poor father believed that our Lord possessed the power of performing miracles. He believed it on the testimony of others, and not because he admitted this man to be the Son of God as He had been solemnly proclaimed by the voice of God Himself on the banks of the Jordan: "This is my beloved Son." He believed it simply because he had heard the general report circulated of the wonderful cures Christ had everywhere wrought. The ruler's faith therefore was purely human, it was not supernatural and divine. Thus he vaguely believed in the extraordinary power of Christ, but not in His divine nature from which His wonderful power emanated. A circumstance indicating his faith to be purely human, and consequently imperfect, is the very demand he made. He wanted our Lord to go down to his house in order to cure his son. Had he possessed the true faith, never would he have made such a request. He would have taken for granted that God can do all things by a simple act of His will. He would have understood that Jesus could cure his son from afar as well as near by, and that it was not at all necessary for Him to approach the bedside of the invalid, as physicians are accustomed to do. Hence he would have rather said with the centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, but say only a word, and my son shall be healed."

Such being the mental attitude of the ruler, we readily

understand the justness of the reproof which our Savior gave him: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not." These words have a very deep meaning, and our Savior uttered them not so much to reprove the ruler as to manifest a truth concerning all men. Here is the hidden meaning of them: You, O unhappy mortals, cannot believe unless you see miracles. With the dim light of your darkened understanding, you are unable to distinguish truth from error. Until now you have been deceived and seduced by so many impostors posing as messengers of God. Instead of satiating you with the bread of truth, they have poisoned you with the weeds of falsehood. Hence you have absolute need that the light of miracles eradicate from your minds every doubt, every uncertainty, so that you may clearly see that God has spoken, that the truths proposed for your belief come from Him and not from man.

Man may be able to deceive his fellow men by falsehood, but God alone can suspend and make an exception to the constant laws of nature. My doctrine will be recognized the world over as divine, because founded on indisputable, miraculous proofs. Without these miracles you could not reject error and embrace truth. Without them, Christian faith could not spread, nor be promulgated among the nations of the earth, nor last for centuries.

Thus it happened. Our forefathers who were Gentiles became Christians through miracles performed by the promulgators of Christianity whom our Lord, in the first ages of the Church, endowed with this marvelous gift as a necessary means of spreading the gospel. And we ourselves believe because we know for certain that our religion was clearly shown to be divine by virtue of so many miracles. Hence we readily understand why infidels of every age have furiously attacked miracles, declaring them impossible, absurd, and regarding them as an artifice to hoodwink the simple minded. Hence they make them the

object of their sacrilegious jests. When they cannot deny the miraculous fact, they endeavor to strip it of every supernatural character. It is absurd to deny the possibility of miracles, because it is tantamount to asserting that God, the Author of nature, cannot change or suspend the laws of nature. It is rash to impugn the existence of miracles, because then, for the same reason, we would be forced to deny all the other facts handed down to us by authentic history.

Some people assert that they only believe the miracles recorded in the Bible, and reject all the others as so many legends. This is a fatal prejudice. For just as God wrought miracles in past ages, so He can do the same at the present day when there is a just motive. Wherefore if prudence counsels us not to believe blindly everything narrated, our reason persuades us that we must not be obstinate and incredulous when the authorized voice of the Church declares some fact miraculous.

Others again repudiate the miracles of former ages on the ground that we do not witness them any more at the present day. Gradually, they assert, as the light of civilization spread over the face of the earth, these frequent prodigies ceased to occur. Therefore it is a clear indication that they were simply the fruit of ignorance and superstition. But it is absolutely false that God does not continue to perform miracles even at the present day. This salutary spring has never run dry in the Church, even though it be not so copious and abundant as in the primitive ages when it was necessary to confirm by miracles the truths of religion. Wherefore as sensible men we must believe in the possibility of miracles and in their historic reality. As reasonable men we ought to profit by them in order to strengthen our faith after the example of the ruler.

Having in fact repeated his request with such urgency, our Lord said to him: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." Reassured by this consoling answer, he went away, and

when he was near his house, his servants met him in order to bring him the joyful news that his son was miraculously cured at the very hour that Jesus had said to him: "Thy son liveth."

The miracle was evident. That happy father understood its meaning and experienced its beneficent effects, for immediately he renounced the errors of paganism. He and his entire family believed in Jesus Christ and became His faithful followers.

There is the great benefit which a miracle usually produces. It leads men to faith. We must however admit that occasionally men are found so obstinate as to resist the evidence of the most striking miracles. Such were the fanatical Jews and the Gentile persecutors. To this class belong many infidels of the present day who ridicule miraculous facts that occur in broad daylight. Let us pity these unfortunates and beg our Divine Lord to keep us from falling into the abyss of such fatal blindness. Let us beseech Him to preserve us with His grace in that faith on which depends our temporal and eternal happiness.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Christian religion is pre-eminently the religion of love, of love that benefits, that commiserates, that is merciful, that suffers, that is self-sacrificing, of love finally that forgives all injuries, even to him who is unworthy of forgiveness. Our Divine Lord is the personification of that sublime love. In His life, in His parables, in all His teachings He affords us various examples of this manifold charity, in order that we His followers may strive to reproduce them in our lives and imitate this sublime Prototype as far as human frailty permits.

In to-day's parable He shows us two striking pictures; on the one hand, the love of God for sinful man, and on the other, the indifference of man for his fellow men. This parable is not the allegorical exposition of a particular fact that happened or might happen in the world. No, it is genuine history ever ancient, ever new of Divine Goodness and human iniquity. If we study it impartially and apply it to ourselves, we shall find ourselves accurately delineated in it, as in a mirror.

I

In the account which the king took of his servants, he discovered one who owed him ten thousand talents. With greater reason Almighty God will exact an account of all men who are bound to employ well the talents confided to them during life. In this rigorous examination which will occur immediately after death and on the day of general judgment, many will be found debtors of Divine Justice, because they departed this life with

their souls steeped in sin and utterly devoid of Christian virtue. Since mercy ends where eternity begins, these unfortunates will find themselves in the absolute impossibility of satisfying the Lord. Nor will they be able to placate Him with tears or supplications. Hence they will behold themselves driven by Him without remission into the prison of eternal misery. Woe to him awaiting the life beyond the tomb in order to solve his indebtedness with the Almighty.

Do not imagine that our Lord will judge His creatures only when they are about to leave this world. It is certain that He scrutinizes our conduct every day and every moment of our lives. He has in fact erected His tribunal within us, in our conscience, in our heart. Is it not indeed true that each time we commit a sin, we immediately hear a severe voice reproving us, revealing to us our condemnation, the same condemnation pronounced against the servant of the gospel, namely, that we were miserably sold and delivered into the power of a cruel master, the demon? And whose voice is it that cannot be stifled if not the voice of God calling us to account the very moment in which we dare to offend Him? How many debtors, do you think, are found in this rigorous examination which God makes of human consciences during life? All men without exception, commencing with Adam who was the first guilty person and who heard the sentence of death pronounced against him: "because thou didst eat, thou shalt return into dust."

We all have repeatedly rendered ourselves debtors of Divine Justice, because frequently in so many ways we have trampled under foot the divine law, and loaded our conscience with so many sins. No one, absolutely no one, not even the most perfect man is found without debts in this tribunal. Should there be anyone making such a presumption, he is mendacious and proud, and for that very reason a greater debtor than the others.

"If anyone saith that he is without sin, he is a liar and the truth is not in him."

Since we are all debtors in the sight of God, what does prudence counsel us to do? Precisely what the servant of the gospel did. When he discovered himself in straitened circumstances, he did not remain idle. He did not become resigned to his miserable condition. Falling down at the feet of his master, he exclaimed: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

We ought to do the same. If by sin we have forfeited the grace of God and deserved His awful chastisements, we should not grow insensible to our unhappy condition, as is the case with so many hardened sinners who pass long years in the state of sin, multiplying all the while their debts with Divine Justice. Just as soon as the voice of conscience reproves and condemns us, we should immediately prostrate ourselves at the feet of Jesus Christ in the tribunal of penance and beseech Him with tears of true compunction to have compassion on us poor sinners, that in His infinite mercy He may forgive us our trespasses. And rest assured that the Lord will not turn a deaf ear to our prayers. He will show us that mercy which the master exercised in behalf of the delinquent servant. For just as he forgave the debt and also the punishment it deserved, so we shall obtain the remission of all our sins and be liberated from the eternal pains of hell which they richly merited.

This infinite indulgence will be granted to us not merely once, but as often as we stand in need of it, for His goodness is without limit towards the repentant sinner. One day St. Peter asked our Savior: "How often shall I forgive my brother who has offended me?" And He replied: "I do not tell thee that thou must forgive him only seven times, but seventy times seven times, that is, without any limitation, as often as he comes repentant begging forgiveness." Could we ever have imagined that the mercy of God extended so far to ungrateful crea-

tures, if our Lord had not expressly taught us this consoling truth? After having seen the conduct of God towards man, conduct full of mercy and love, let us consider now how man behaves towards his fellowmen. From the emphatic contrast let us learn to be ashamed of ourselves, realizing how bereft of pity and compassion we sometimes are.

II

The gospel narrates that this servant, so generously pardoned, met upon the road a fellow servant who owed him the paltry sum of a hundred pence. Laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest.

Entreaties and prayers had no effect on this inhuman wretch. Deaf to all supplications, he cast him into prison until he paid the last farthing. Is not that the daily history of so many whose heart is harder than flint towards their dependents who are really their brethren? How many avaricious individuals swimming in opulence mercilessly exact the last farthing from their indigent debtors? They grow fat on the blood of widows and orphans. How many soulless corporations wish to grind their employés into the dust? How many try to swell their annual dividends by snatching the bread from the mouths of their workmen and families? Then the loan sharks, those vampires practically feeding on human blood! How many unfortunates have they not driven to desperation! This is the ordinary way in which men without God behave towards their fellow men.

If charity requires that we help the unfortunate in their indigence, giving them of our abundance, will it not also require that we show them mercy, refraining from all recourse to violence in order to extort from them what they cannot possibly give? All these inhuman cruelties, foreclosures, evictions employed against the destitute and which may have legal sanction, nevertheless cry

to heaven for vengeance, and the vengeance of heaven will descend upon those guilty of them.

Just as the master in the gospel was justly indignant at the conduct of the ungrateful servant, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay the entire debt, so the Lord will consign to the demons those heartless monsters in order that they may pay the penalty of their crimes in the flames of hell. In fact Divine Justice will not wait for the future life to punish them; they will have their chastisement in the present one. They themselves are digging the grave which eventually will swallow them up together with their dishonestly made fortunes.

In fact these flagrant injustices which the captains of frenzied finance commit against poor, unsuspecting investors, are what arouses in the masses a furious hatred against wealth in any form. That is what renders the labor problem so perplexing and difficult of solution. That is what feeds the cancers of socialism and anarchy.

Woe the day when this universal discontent of the laboring millions shall burst forth into a social revolution. That will indeed be the Dies irae when divine vengeance shall descend upon heartless plutocrats, the day in which they will receive even here upon earth the chastisement which they have been preparing by their crimes.

Let all then both rich and poor imitate the infinite mercy of God towards us. Let us have pity and compassion for our fellow men, considering ourselves as we really are — all members of that great family whose head is our heavenly Father. May the charity of Jesus Christ reign always in our midst! It has the power to alleviate all human misery. It alone can solve the great social questions agitating at present all peoples and nations. It alone can transform this unhappy earth into a sojourn of delight and peace. The Apostle of love, every time that he spoke to his people in the declining years of his

life, was accustomed to repeat these words: "My little children, love one another." Allow me to repeat the same admonition, remarking with him that this is pre-eminently the precept of Jesus Christ, and that the observance of this commandment suffices in order to be His true followers, and consequently sharers in His eternal rewards.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Fraud, deceit, is the weapon of the vile, the weapon employed by the adversaries of truth and the champions of falsehood. Such were the enemies of Christ, especially the Pharisees. Wishing to lay one of their usual snares, they came to Him one day in the guise of friendship while nourishing in their hearts the deepest hatred, and gave Him the greatest eulogy that had ever been given Him by His most fervent disciples. In fact they rendered public and solemn testimony of His sincerity, of the orthodoxy of His teachings, of the honesty of His character, because He spoke the truth to all without exception. "Master, we know that thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man, for thou dost not regard the person of men." But these cunning seducers concealed a lethal poison beneath a flattering exterior. We shall see the insidious question of the Pharisees and the wise reply of our Savior. From both let us endeavor to draw useful lessons for our spiritual advantage.

I

If praise was insincere in the mouth of the Pharisees, subtle and deceitful was the question they proposed to our Divine Redeemer. These haughty adversaries of the Roman Empire pretended to doubt whether it were lawful to pay the public taxes. They really employed this pretext in order to compromise Him either with the people by exposing Him as a partisan of the foreigner, or with the magistrates by denouncing Him as a rebel. "Ex-

plain to us therefore," they said, " tell us your opinion. Is it lawful or not to render tribute to Cæsar?" This race of vipers had a very elastic conscience which they could relax or restrain at will, or rather their conscience adapted itself at all times to their selfish interest.

On the present occasion they are scrupulous about paying tribute to the Roman Emperor, fearing lest this act should be construed as a solemn sanction of his dominion over Judea. Upon another occasion when there was question of intimidating the governor Pilate to pronounce the death sentence against Christ, they did not hesitate publicly to proclaim themselves faithful subjects of the foreign monarch, exclaiming with a loud voice: " We have no other king but Cæsar."

How many fickle-minded Christians imitate the Pharisees by changing their language and behavior according as the occasion requires! When in the company of priests and practical Catholics they show themselves most obedient to the Church and her teachings. For them every Catholic movement is an inspiration; the parochial school is the only safeguard for the morals of the rising generation. They have nothing but words of praise for nuns and clergy, for the Archbishop down to the humblest curate. Let them, however, be thrown among careless Catholics and enemies of the Church, and they speedily lay aside the mask concealing their abject nature. The bishop then is no good, the priests are a lot of grafters, or perhaps worse; the parochial schools are not up to date. It is a crime against society to let the children frequent them. If there be question of securing a lucrative position or the influence of someone in power, they are willing to make any sacrifice. If needs be, they will deny Christ and His Church, and are ready to join any organization or forbidden society for worldly gain. It is hardly necessary to warn you against this class of degenerates. Let us be men of character, Christians truly worthy of the name. Let us be ever strong in our con-

victions, having for our only guide the law of God and not the changeable whims of our passions.

Our Savior could have answered directly the question of the Pharisees that not only was it lawful, but a duty to render tribute to the Roman Emperor. He wished, however, to convince them by a practical proof in order the better to remove all cavil, and at the same time avoid the snare they had cunningly prepared for Him. Hence He asked them to show Him the coin of the tribute. "And when they gave it to Him, He asked: Whose image and inscription is this? They replied: Cæsar's. Then He added: Render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's."

Solemn indeed is the precept He announced. It forms the basis of all Christian politics. It defines and limits the obligations of every Christian to the civil power. Every soul, as St. Paul teaches in his letter to the Romans, that is, every man must live subject, subordinate, obedient to the higher powers, namely to those governing the state with absolute authority. For there is no power but from God, and those that exist, are ordained of God. All power emanates from Him as the author and beginning of all good. All power springs from God Who has wished that all men united in society should have a head which should guide them to the common good, which should also protect private interest, by means of which disorders should be repressed, virtue honored and rewarded, peace and justice maintained.

He therefore who does not obey authority, refuses obedience to an institution of God Himself, and merits punishment both from outraged society and from God Who punishes such disobedience with eternal chastisements. "Who resisteth power, resisteth the ordinance of God." This proposition is general and embraces all powers even illegitimate, Gentile and inimical to the faith. All are ordained and instituted by God. To this power therefore tribute is due as an obligation of re-

ligion and conscience, as the Apostle teaches: "Tribute to whom tribute."

This doctrine conformable to sound reason was explained and confirmed by the splendid examples of our Divine Redeemer Who always showed obedience and deference to the civil power. We know from the gospel that in order to obey the edict of Cæsar, He so arranged before His birth that His parents should repair with great hardship to Bethlehem. We also know that He wished to pay the tribute not only for Himself but also for Peter, performing in fact a miracle in order to teach us by example the necessity of fulfilling this duty. Let us therefore turn a deaf ear to the maxims subversive of authority which nowadays are being circulated throughout the world. Let us adhere to the doctrine of the Catholic Church which is the doctrine of God. Let us show deference to the civil authority, not merely through fear, but through conscience, and render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

At the same time let us not forget to render to God the things that are God's, because our obedience to earthly power is not absolute, but limited, and must have its just limits. When earthly powers command us to do something contrary to the laws of God and His Church, then we can and must make a passive, but energetic and absolute resistance. In such a case the iniquitous legislator ceases to be God's representative. Then we must frankly and resolutely reply what the Apostle St. Peter replied to the Jewish Sanhedrim when told not to preach any more in the name of Jesus: "We must obey God rather than men." Words full of heavenly wisdom which served as a rule for thirteen million martyrs who bowed their heads to the executioner rather than obey the tyrant. They defended truth and justice with their blood.

He therefore, who does not wish to violate the dictates of conscience and render himself guilty of grievous sin,

must rigorously follow the precept of Jesus Christ, by rendering to God the things that are God's. He must be ready for love of Him, to sacrifice all — liberty, wealth, and life itself, and fearlessly reply like so many of his forefathers in the faith: As a citizen I am willing to offer my life's blood for my country, but not my soul. Above all human laws, there stands the law of God which cannot be broken without mortal sin and with the certainty of seeing ourselves one day rejected by Him as rebellious and excluded from His kingdom.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

This morning's gospel records two wonderful miracles: the resurrection of a young girl, and the instantaneous cure of a poor woman who for twelve years had suffered from an issue of blood. Our Lord as usual performed these two miracles in order to reward the ardent faith of those who had recourse to Him. In fact He showed Himself unusually indulgent and benign on this occasion, for He immediately granted the requests without making any objection or resenting the frequently exacting and useless requirements of the supplicants.

Having been invited by a ruler of the synagogue to come and lay His hand upon the deceased daughter, He immediately followed the ruler. He refused a similar request to the centurion and cured his servant without a personal visit. The poor woman afflicted with a hemorrhage was firmly convinced that if she could only touch the hem of His garment, she would be healed of her infirmity. Our Lord strengthened her conviction by granting through this simple contact of His garment the restoration of health she so ardently desired. Let us briefly meditate upon this prolific passage of the gospel and nourish our souls with the fruits with which it is so abundantly filled.

I

A grave misfortune had visited one of the most distinguished families. Sorrow is not the exclusive inheritance of the common people. Grief makes no exception in favor of the great and powerful, but strikes

without distinction all the children of Adam. It is folly to imagine that the wealthy are the happiest and most contented people on earth, and that the poor are the most miserable and discontented. Splendor, wealth, and honors are frequently the magnificent raiment concealing the deepest affliction. So it was with the illustrious family of the ruler. Death had cut short the life of a little girl who no doubt was the delight of her parents. The father who loved her tenderly, felt the bitter pang more than all the rest. Realizing that the world could offer him no hope, he resolved to have recourse to Jesus, the merciful consoler of the wretched, to Him Who miraculously healed all human infirmities, and with a powerful hand snatched even victims from the very jaws of death.

Misfortune was and always will be a wise counsellor, for it leads men to God, just as prosperity draws them away from Him. While fortune favors man he does not feel the need of God and turns his back upon Him. While man is happy he seems to be master of the world. He is strongly tempted to abandon virtue and to wallow in vice. But if clouds of adversity darken the horizon, if contrary winds blow, oh, then, how soon he bows his head! How rapidly he changes language and behavior, and recommends himself not only to God, but to all the saints of heaven.

Priests may indeed render themselves hoarse preaching amendment of life, the necessity of prayer, of frequenting the Church and the sacraments to the people. They are words thrown to the winds, sterile recommendations. The less perverse may laugh at the admonitions and continue to do as they always have done. But let an epidemic or an earthquake strike the community. That is the mute yet eloquent sermon that will convert the most obstinate. The world then changes tone; men turn to God and run in search of Him as rapidly as they beforehand had fled from Him. That

is exactly what the ruler did. It needed his daughter's death to make him take that step, humiliating perhaps to his pride, but abounding for him in so many blessings. And where did He find our Lord? He found Him addressing the people, dispensing to the ignorant multitude the bread of His heavenly doctrine. Nowhere in the gospel do we read of our Lord having been found in recreation, repose, or idleness, but invariably occupied in the exercise of His ministry, or in the act of preaching or suffering for us. He never took any comfort, never suspended His labors, but employed every moment of time to benefit suffering humanity. Thus every Christian should do. Time flies rapidly and never returns. Time is very short. Hence it should be employed with the greatest diligence, because on the use of it depends our future destiny.

What then can be said of those who do not know how to employ their time? Of those continually seeking distractions in order to kill time which seems to them eternal? What shall we say of those who squander hours, days, and years in a detestable sloth, in idleness, in sinful amusements? The wheel of time soon makes its gyration, the close of life, the end of time soon arrives and what will these unfortunates have gained for the life to come? Their hands will be empty, and their conscience loaded with remorse in the presence of eternity. You can readily imagine the consequences of this most culpable indolence.

II

While Jesus was proceeding to the house of the dead girl, a poor woman who had been suffering from an issue of blood for twelve years, came behind Him and touched the hem of His garment, saying within herself: If I touch only His garment, I shall be healed. Great was the faith of this woman, greater undoubtedly than that of the ruler, because he deemed the personal

visit of our Lord absolutely necessary in order to obtain the favor requested.

She on the contrary firmly believed the sole contact of His garment sufficient to cure her. Our Lord turned around to this ardent believer, and showing that He knew thoroughly her most secret needs as well as the motive prompting her extraordinary act of faith, said to her: "Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. Not the touching of my garment, but thy faith which made thee believe in my omnipotent power," power which can employ the most unseemly instruments to effect the most astounding prodigies.

We honor the relics of the saints, we pay them respect in the hope that they may liberate us from present and future evils. But we must remember that of themselves they possess no intrinsic virtue to work miracles independently of a bestowal from the goodness and power of God. He makes use of them in order to honor His saints and reward the lively faith of good Christians.

When Jesus arrived at the house of the ruler, He saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout. He immediately ordered them out, because the Lord dislikes tumult. He loves quiet and delights to abide in those places and with those persons who shun the distracting uproar of the world. Having dispersed the crowd and restored peace, He went into the room of the dead girl. Without uttering a word, He simply took her by the hand, as if to awaken her from sleep. The maid arose instantly, as if she had been really sleeping, to the amazement of the whole country and to the immense joy of that sorrow-stricken family. How powerful God is! He freely disposes of life and death. With the greatest facility He can resuscitate the dead. Imagine whether He experiences any difficulty in causing the living to die! With a breath of His omnipotence, by an act of His will, He can scatter this miserable dust

of which our body is composed, and resolve into nothingness the whole human race.

Oh, how ridiculous and stupid we are in our pride! At any moment the thread of our existence may be snapped in twain, and nevertheless we are so conceited as to offend Him Who holds our destinies in His hands. It is indeed insanity to provoke the indignation of God. The thought of our own preservation ought to fill us with the greatest reverence and fear of Him Who while He has given us life, may deprive us of it at any moment. True wisdom consists in the fear of the Lord, because he who fears Him will not offend Him, and by not offending Him will attain eternal happiness. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

It helps greatly to recall frequently to mind the great events of the past. But it is of still greater advantage to meditate upon those which will happen to us in the future, in order to understand all the vanity of the present and not allow ourselves to be seduced by deceitful delusions. For this reason our Lord assuming a prophetic tone foretold to His Apostles two great events: the destruction of Jerusalem and the consummation of the world. The first was to occur a few years after His ascension into heaven and precisely the seventieth year of the Christian era by the strength of the Romans, blind instruments of Divine vengeance against that wicked city. The other event will take place at the end of time, a period unknown to us, and by virtue of God's infinite power. Just as in a twinkling He brought the world forth from nothing, so by an act of His omnipotence He will cause it to fall back again into its original nothingness. We shall not witness that frightful catastrophe, because long beforehand death will have claimed us as its victims. We shall, however, participate in other striking and solemn occurrences immediately following the end of the world, namely, the resurrection of the body and the general judgment. All these interesting events are predicted for our benefit by Jesus Christ in to-day's gospel, so that they may not steal upon us unawares to our irreparable loss. We should therefore listen to the history of our future destiny at least with the same interest we evince in gathering the trivial news of the day which brings us no real advantage.

I

Before speaking of what will happen at the end of the world our Lord gives us most important advice, so that we may follow it as a safe rule during life. "If any man shall say to you: Lo, here is Christ, or there, do not believe him. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive (if possible) even the elect." With these words our Lord intended to forewarn His followers against the seductions of so many impostors who would appear in the world to ruin souls with their insane doctrines. And who are these? They are all the heretics, the sectarians who put themselves forward as prophets, as reformers of the doctrine of Christ, while in reality they were simply sowers of cockle, rapacious wolves who carried off a good portion of the flock from the Christian fold, deceiving it with fine phrases, and sometimes with wonders which they performed, not by Divine power, but with the aid of the evil one. Thus did Simon the Magician who strove to fly and finished to his great mortification by falling and breaking his legs at the prayer of the Prince of the Apostles. False prophets are likewise all the anarchist and socialist demagogues who attack Jesus Christ and His Church, claiming that it has outlived its usefulness, styling themselves with detestable pride the apostles of humanity, the luminaries of the world, the redeemers of the people, and even the Christ of the new era. How many, especially among the laboring classes, have been and are still perverted by the cunning and sophistry of these impostors! How many have lost and are losing the priceless gift of faith, and with their faith the hope of eternal salvation! It is really disheartening to see the immense number of those allowing themselves to be perverted at the present day. This spectacle should fill us with apprehension of our own fate, if we do not conduct ourselves with the greatest prudence, especially

in the choice of our company and in the selection of our reading. That we may avoid this danger our Lord warns us not to hearken to the maxims of the world, and in religious matters to place no faith in the assertions of private individuals, no matter how intellectual and erudite they may appear. We have an infallible guide left us by our Savior Himself for our spiritual direction. This guide alone we should listen to and follow in everything pertaining to our spiritual welfare, sure of not being deceived or of falling into error. This guide is the teaching body of the Church composed of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy united to the Roman Pontiff.

This guide teaches us that Christ has already come into the world and saved the world. It teaches us to regard as impostors all those placing themselves above Him, teaching a doctrine different from His, subverting those principles upon which the social fabric rests as upon a solid foundation. This guide teaches us that Christ will come a second time into the world to judge all men and nations and that no one can predict or know the time of His second advent. It teaches that this final coming will be preceded by awful signs filling mankind with the greatest fear. "For," says Christ, "the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be moved," that is to say, all nature shall be thrown into the greatest confusion. Such are the signs preceding the end of the world, or rather this will be the commencement of that universal catastrophe.

And what shall happen to mankind?

Those still living will perish by reason of these disorders and the convulsion of nature. But the fate of mankind will differ from that of the material world. In fact it will be just the contrary. For the world will be destroyed, but mankind will be reanimated. The world shall perish, but men shall rise again. It is always Jesus Christ Who reveals to us these solemn truths in His

gospel. And as it is a question of positive facts depending entirely on divine omnipotence, we must firmly believe them, because He Who predicted them, can and wishes to accomplish them.

"The Son of Man," our Lord continues, "will send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the furthest parts of the heaven to the utmost bounds of them." The sound of those angelic trumpets will be so powerful as to penetrate the sepulchres and shake those cold remains over which centuries have exercised their destructive power. Thus all men that ever existed will return without exception to life and assume the same bodies they had while on earth. The last act of this event remains to be accomplished. Mankind as if by magic will rise again. The great family of Adam, which until then was divided by distance and time, will find itself for the first and only occasion all gathered together and united, from the first man down to the last mortal. But this union will be of exceedingly short duration. An absolute and eternal separation will divide the human race. The angels will separate the good from the wicked, just as the shepherd separates the lambs from the goats, just as the farmer sifts the good grain from the chaff, or as the fisherman when he selects the good fish from the bad ones. After which the sign of the Son of Man, i.e., the cross, shall appear in the heavens; and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty.

What a difference between the first and second coming of Christ! In the first He is the God of peace Who comes into the world to save those that were lost. In the second He is the God of justice Who comes to judge all nations and tribes of the earth. Humility, gentleness, love were the characteristics of His first advent. And at the end of the world He will appear in majesty, power, and glory. His first coming was a motive of jubilation; His second

will be one of fear. And justly so. For, on that awful day the Lord will judge every man, giving to each one the recompense or chastisement he has merited.

Then shall be opened the books of human consciences in which are recorded all our works. Then shall be torn away the masks that concealed so much baseness and iniquity. Then shall thunder forth the terrible accents of divine anger. Then like lightning shall flash the sentence deciding the fates of eternity. The elect shall soar triumphantly into the realm of glory, and the reprobates shall be precipitated like lead into the abyss of eternal woe.

There, my dear friends, is the serious history of the future awaiting us all. Everything may fail, since here below there is nothing stable and certain, but you may rest assured that these great events will be realized exactly at the time specified by our Divine Redeemer. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words of Christ shall not pass away. What shall become of us on that awful day? What shall become of us sinners, if scarcely the just man shall feel secure? Where shall we seek safety and refuge? Who shall be our protector? Unfortunate the man who finds comfort in vain delusions. We can take refuge from the ills of the present life, but not from those of eternity. We can fly from the hands of man, but not from those of God. Then we shall be alone, and our only company will be the works we have performed during life. Those works if good, will save us; if bad, they will be the cause of our eternal damnation.

Therefore, if we wish to be saved on that decisive day, we must carefully do good while we live. We must lay up an abundant store of merits, as the Apostle strongly recommends: "Strive through good works to render certain your vocation and calling." (II Peter i, 10.)

This is the means employed by all those who now are saved. It is the means you also must adopt, if you have at heart your eternal salvation.

THE END

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Finco, Gaetano
AUTHOR

Homilies on all the Sundays
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